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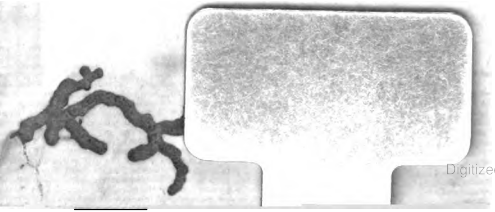

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THE GROUND AND CREDIBILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION:

IN

A COURSE OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

AT THE

LECTURE

FOUNDED BY THE REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M. A. LATE CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY THE

REV. RICHARD SHEPHERD, D.D. F.R.S.

ARCHDEACON OF BEDFORD,

AND CHAPLAIN TO THE RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM.

LONDON:

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Extract from the laſt Will and Teſtament of the late Rev. JOHN BAMPTON, *Canon of* Saliſbury.

—— " I give and bequeath my Lands and Eſtates " to the Chancellor, Maſters, and Scholars of the " Univerſity of Oxford for ever, to have and to hold " all and ſingular the ſaid Lands or Eſtates upon " truſt, and to the intents and purpoſes hereafter " mentioned; that is to ſay, I will and appoint, that " the Vice-Chancellor of the Univerſity of Oxford " for the time being ſhall take and receive all the " rents, iſſues, and profits thereof, and (after all " taxes, reparations, and neceſſary deductions made) " that he pay all the remainder to the endowment of " eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, to be eſtabliſhed " for ever in the ſaid Univerſity, and to be perform- " ed in the manner following.

" I direct and appoint, that upon the firſt Tueſday " in Eaſter Term, a Lecturer be yearly choſen by " the Heads of Colleges only, and by no others, in " the room adjoining to the Printing-Houſe, between " the hours of ten in the morning and two in the after- " noon, to preach eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, " the year following, at St. Mary's in Oxford, be- " tween the commencement of the laſt month in Lent " Term, and the end of the third week in Act " Term.

" Alſo I direct and appoint, that the eight Divi- " nity Lecture Sermons ſhall be preached upon either " of the following ſubjects—to confirm and eſtabliſh " the Chriſtian Faith, and to confute all heretics and " ſchiſmatics—upon the divine authority of the Holy " Scriptures—upon the authority of the writings of the

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" primitive Fathers, as to the faith and practice of " the primitive Church—upon the Divinity of our " Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—upon the Divinity ' of the Holy Ghost—upon the Articles of the Chris- " tian Faith, as comprehended in the Apostles' and " Nicene Creeds.

" Also I direct that thirty copies of the eight Di- " vinity Lecture Sermons shall be always printed, " within two months after they are preached, and " one copy shall be given to the Chancellor of the " University, and one copy to the head of every Col- " lege, and one copy to the Mayor of the city of " Oxford, and one copy to be put into the Bodleian " Library; and the expence of printing them shall " be paid out of the Lands or Estates given for esta- " blishing the Divinity Lecture Sermons; and the " Preacher shall not be paid, nor be entitled to the " revenue, before they are printed.

" Also I direct and appoint, that no person shall " be qualified to preach the Divinity Lecture Ser- " mons, unless he hath taken the Degree of Master " of Arts at least, in one of the two Universities of " of Oxford or Cambridge; and the same person " shall never preach the Divinity Lecture Sermons " twice."

DEDICA-

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TO

THE RIGHT REVEREND

THOMAS THURLOW, D. D.

LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM.

MY LORD,

THE appointment, which produced the following Diſcourſes, will in ſome degree ſanction my ambition to preſent them to the public under the protection of your Lordſhip's Name. It originated with the Univerſity of Oxford: and intereſted as your Lordſhip is in whatever may

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claim the leaſt relation to a place, where you paſſed many of your early years with a Propriety of Conduct, that hath marked your Character through life, you will I am ſure accept with Condeſcenſion the efforts thus excited, to elucidate the Truth and Purity of that Religion, of which you have ever diſcovered yourſelf in Heart and Practice a warm and conſiſtent Friend.

I am well aware, that I have ventured on ground already taken; and that many valuable Treatiſes have appeared on the ſubject of the following ſheets. But there is a mode of writing peculiar to different periods:

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riods; and the Folios of the laſt age are ill reliſhed by the deſultory readers of this. Hence it is, that ſome of thoſe publications alluded to have fallen into diſeſteem; as being too diffuſe, and appearing tedious: digreſſing into extraneous matter on ſome points not very material, and treating with a degree of languor others of more importance. Thoſe on the other hand, which are compriſed in the narrow limits of one or two Sermons, I conceive to be in ſubſtance too compreſſed, to afford general ſatisfaction; the Brevity requiring too many aſſumptions, to obviate the doubts of Sceptical enquirers. Others again, though recommending, and enforcing founded

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Truths with Elegance and Perpicuity, ſeem rather calculated to impreſs the mind already perſuaded; than to obviate the Exceptions of Cavil, and ſatisfy Scruple and Doubt.

Theſe obſervations have long induced me to think ſomething further wanting: ſomething on the ſubject in form and matter clear, yet cloſe and argumentative; ſuch as adverting to Objections as they roſe, and thus clearing the way to Truth, might command aſſent on the aſſured Ground of Conviction. Purſuant of ſuch deſign, I have, in the ſubſequent inveſtigation, taken nothing for granted: proceeding gradually from proof to proof, and

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ſhunning, as I proceeded, the diſcuſſion of no diſputable article that lay in the way of my plan.

In thoſe metaphyſical diſquiſitions, to which my ſubject occaſionally led me, I have particularly aimed at Perſpicuity: ſenſible, that whenever a writer involves his ideas in Obſcurity, it will always remain a doubt whether he be ſatisfactory to himſelf, and is an abſolute bar to the conviction of others. On ſubjects of that nature, it is not eaſy to write to the comprehenſion of every reader; but, as far as I was able, I have attempted to do it.

And as new Adverſaries of a Religion, the Tenets of which are of a nature to excite none, but ſuch as are Adverſaries to human Happineſs, are continually aiming at new Objections, or vamping old ones up in new ſtile and figure; I have, on every article, more particularly applied myſelf to the Exceptions of modern writers. Every futile objection, in the ſhort form preſcribed on the preſent occaſion, it was not poſſible to notice: of thoſe that have been propoſed to the public with moſt Plauſibility, and retailed with the greateſt Succeſs, I have not deſignedly paſſed by any; for indeed I have obſerved none, that in the fair field of argument might not ſafely be met.

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The plan I propoſed to purſue, and which in the early Proceſs of the Lectures I communicated to your Lordſhip, you were pleaſed to regard in a favourable light: I have now to wiſh the Execution may merit your equal approbation. But this in whatever degree your judgment may with-hold, I am eaſy in the perſuaſion, that your Lordſhip's known Zeal for the Intereſts of our common Religion will with Candour regard a well-intentioned endeavour; a zeal, my Lord, which you have diſplayed in every ſituation of life; particularly in that exalted one, which afforded you the more ample ſcope for exertion: not terminating there in cold and languid Wiſhes, but

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expreſſed in a cordial Attention to indigent and deſerving Miniſters in your Dioceſe; who have often found themſelves promoted without Application on their Part, and often againſt the Application of Greatneſs and Power.

There is Merit in ſupporting an inferior Station with Firmneſs and Reſignation: but much greater, as it is a much more difficult part to ſuſtain, in filling an exalted one with Propriety and Attention; in which the Claims of Duty are more numerous, and the Charge of greater Weight. Our Minds indeed are formed with different Aptitudes: and ſome there are, that only feel themſelves in elevated Situations; where there is Scope for Exertion, and

Room

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Room to expand. But it is your Lordſhip's peculiar Felicity, to appear formed, or more properly to form yourſelf, for every Situation in life, to which you have been occaſionally called; from the literary eaſe of academic privacy, to the higheſt honours of your profeſſion: to have in every ſituation, through which you paſſed, conciliated Eſteem, and left it with the general Regret of thoſe, with whom you have been reſpectively connected.

Thoſe Inducements alone would have directed my pen to this Addreſs, if more powerful ones were wanting: the Pleaſure of acknowledging the Favours, I have from your Lordſhip myſelf received; and the Satisfaction

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tisfaction of teſtifying to the world, how much, and how truly, I have the Honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordſhip's dutiful,

Moſt obliged,

And devoted ſervant,

R. Shepherd.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

REFERENCE having been made in the Courſe of the following Diſcourſes to a Paradiſiacal State, the Author has annexed to them a Latin Sermon on the Subject; though written on a different Occaſion, and preached ſeveral Years ago.

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CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

Introductory Diſcourſe, diſtinguiſhing the Excellency of Chriſtianity from that variable Rule of Duty, in the Pretenſions of moral Fitneſs held out by the Deiſt; and the Chriſtianity of the Goſpel, from that Species of it adopted by the Nazarenes and Ebionites, and by Socinus and his Followers revived.

PROV. iii. 13, &c.

Happy is the man that findeth wiſdom, and the man that getteth underſtanding: &c.

SERMON II.

The Exiſtence of God demonſtrated: His Omnipotence, in the Superſedure of Nature, vindicated: His Immateriality aſſerted.

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ROM. i. 10, &c.

For the invisible Things of Him from the Creation of the World are clearly seen, being understood by the Things that are made; even His eternal Power and Godhead.

SERMON III.

A Divine Super-intendence displayed in the natural and moral Government of the World: establishing the Doctrine of a particular, as well as general, Providence.

JOB. xxxi. 4.

Doth He noe see my ways, and count all my steps?

SERMON IV.

The general Obligation of Religion: the Ground and Necessity of the Duty of Prayer: the Connection between Religion and the social Duties.

PS. xcv. 6.

O come let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker: for He is our God, and we are the People of His Pastnre.

SERMON

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SERMON V.

An Enquiry into the Competency of the Light of Nature, to aſcertain the Duties of Religion; or whether a more expreſs Revelation of the Will of God in thoſe Particulars be neceſſary.

ISAIAH lix. 9.

We wait for Light; but behold Obſcurity: for Brightneſs, but we walk in Darkneſs.

SERMON VI.

The Poſſibility of a Revelation; and the Characteriſtic marks neceſſary to illuſtrate it: with Conſiderations on the Pretenſions of the Revelation made to the Jews.

JOHN iv. 2.

Salvation is of the Jews.

SERMON VII.

An Enquiry into the General Expectation of a Meſſiah: and Whether the Prophetic writings of the Jews repreſent Him to have been a temporal Prince and Conqueror, or ſomething greater.

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MATT. xxii. 42.

What think ye of Chriſt?

SERMON VIII.

An Enquiry into the general Scope and Tenor of the Scriptures of the New Teſtament, reſpecting the Nature and Character of Chriſt.

MATT. xxii. 42.

What think ye of Chriſt?

CONCIO LATINA.

De Statu Paradiſiaco.

ECCLUS. vii. 30.

Hoc tantum inveni; quod Deus homines perfectos creavit, ipſi autem ratiocinia plurima invenerunt.

THE

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THE

Ground and Credibility

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

SERMON I.

PROV. iii. 13, &c.

Happy is the man, that findeth wiſdom, and the man that getteth underſtanding: for the merchandiſe of it is better than the merchandiſe of ſilver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canſt deſire, are not to be compared with her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them, that lay hold on her.

THE original word חכמה, in this place rendered, wiſdom, is, in the firſt chapter of this book of Proverbs, uſed in

SERMON I.

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SERMON I.

the plural number: which, according to the Hebrew idiom, is ſometimes ſubſtituted for a ſuperlative degree. *Wiſdom crieth without*; or, literally tranſlated, *wiſdoms:* the word חכמות there denoting the higheſt and moſt excellent wiſdom; the wiſdom of religion: which is indeed ſo far the higheſt point of wiſdom; that, though its roots be fixed on earth, its branches reach to heaven: it hath the promiſe both of this world, and that which is to come. 'Tis the ſame kind of wiſdom, that is deſcribed in my text; and in this ſenſe the word is frequently uſed, both in this book of Proverbs, and Eccleſiaſtes. The deſcription is highly luxuriant; and were it as true, as it is rich and elegant, one might conceive it of ſuch efficacy to captivate mankind; that no attention would be witheld, no exertions ſpared, to conciliate an ample plenary poſſeſſion of her: at leaſt that no wiſhes would prevail, no endeavours be exerted, to baniſh ſuch a religion from the earth.

But

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SERMON I.

But with what religion will this engaging imagery comport? Not with the religion of nature; for in different ages, and different countries, the religion of nature hath deviated into the groſſeſt errors. It taught the Perſian, to pay his adoration to the ſun; and ſome parts of India, to worſhip the tremendous power of darkneſs and evil. It directed the Egyptian, to fall down and humble himſelf to the reptile, and the plant; and impelled mankind to ſuperſtitions, often as immoral, as the rites themſelves were ridiculous and vain. Whether the Theology of Greece and Rome were founded in political artifice, or in the flights of poetical imagination, the deſcription before us can not apply to that religion: for it boaſted not a ſingle character of wiſdom, purity, or ſatisfaction. Nor doth it aptly ſuit the imperfect, incompleat religion of the Jews. Burthened with a yoke of ceremonies, which, ſays the apoſtle, *neither we, nor our fathers were able to bear*; by a rigid obſervance

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SERMON I.

of thoſe ceremonies, expoſed to innumerable and great hardſhips, and denied a variety of gratifications, did they tread the way of pleaſantneſs: or cut off from the reſt of the world, hating their neighbours, and in their turn deſpiſed and ridiculed by them, knew they the path of peace? The tree of life they had forfeited, and it had been removed far from them; nor did the inſtitutions of their religion, nor even its promiſes, as underſtood by them, extend ſo far, as to enable them to lay hold on it.

The divine Encomiaſt looked farther, and higher. Rapt into future ages, he exhibits the picture of a perfect religion: and if we examine the traits of it, we ſhall find the animated deſcription ſuit only the religion of Jeſus Chriſt; and ſuit it in every particular. What is *the merchandiſe* of *ſilver* and *gold*, and *precious ſtones*, with all that is deſirable in life; when ſet in competition with the gain, which that religion propoſes, the

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the acquiſition of the Kingdom of Heaven? In enjoining temperance, the fountain of health, and parent of longevity, ſhe holds out *length of days in her right hand*: and the general prohibition of ſenſual and worldly pleaſures, *the luſt of the fleſh, the deſire of the eye, and the pride of life*, which Chriſtianity pronounces, will, if complied with, in its natural conſequences, and according to the ordinary diſpenſations of Providence, conduct us to, what *her left hand offers, riches and honour*. So *eaſy is her yoke, and light her burden*; that her ways may be juſtly ſtiled *ways of pleaſantneſs*, and *her paths the path-way of peace*. Through a Redeemer's ſufferings, we are re-inſtated in the poſſeſſion of *the tree of life*: and it is in every Chriſtian's power, to reach out his hand, and *lay hold on it*. SERMON I.

If nature incline men to wiſh for happineſs, and with the rules of ſuch a religion as this, a religion ſo happily calculated to promote it, they cannot be

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SERMON I.

brought univerſally to comply; we have to lament the intemperance of youth, the worldly-mindedneſs of age, and perhaps above all to deplore the known depravity of human nature, which can beſt account for ſo inconſiſtent a conduct. But that numbers ſhould be found, uninfluenced, as it may ſeem, by any incentive, except the fiend-like motive of counteracting the happineſs of the human race, anxious to extirpate ſuch a religion from the world; now combating it with the force of arguguments, ſuch as ſubtilty ſupplies, now employing the light weapons of irony and ridicule againſt it; haranguing diſcipular circles in every place of public reſort, retailing inſipid objections, which have been a hundred times refuted, compaſſing ſea and land to make proſelytes to their opinions: this, did not experience inconteſtibly prove the fact, would tranſcend our belief; as it almoſt baffles reaſon to account for ſuch exertions.

Some

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Some motives however may be aſſigned, tending to excite thoſe malevolent attacks: the affectation of ſingularity, the love of novelty, the repugnance to whatever checks the tide of preſent pleaſures, the pride of ſeeming wiſe; the conſcious meanneſs of acknowledging the charms of virtue, and at the ſame time ſtooping to the practiſe of vice, and, from thence derived, the audacity of juſtifying that practice by deſtroying or confounding all principles of religious truth. Theſe, acting on different minds, may influence correſpondent habits of thinking; and produce and explain the illiberal inſults which religion ſometimes ſuſtains: while reaſon ſhudders at the deſperate ſtake the raſh adventurer riſks in an unequal conteſt; where he can gain nothing, and may loſe every thing.

But amidſt the various engines, that have been ſet at work, to prejudice the intereſts of Chriſtianity, none are more

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SERMON I.

miſchievous than thoſe; which have ſubſtituted ſome ſhew of religion in its room. For attacks upon a religion ſo pure in its precepts, ſo calculated to improve the mind in virtue, and raiſe it above mean, and ſelfiſh, and narrow purſuits, without the pretended introduction of ſome other religion in its place, can have no better effects with ſober and ſerious men; than to convince them of ſecret deſigns, framed againſt virtue's ſelf, and tending to ſet mankind looſe from all reſtraints of conſcience, and the ſhackles of moral duty.

Againſt ſuch efforts the world is guarded: and treat them as deſperate attempts to diſſolve the bonds of ſociety, and introduce barbariſm, anarchy, and confuſion. And that this muſt be the conſequence of principles of Atheiſm, or of that kind of Theiſm, as detrimental to the morals of mankind as Atheiſm itſelf, which ſuppoſes God to have no regard of human actions, is a truth

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truth generally assented to, and well understood. SERMON I.

Of those adversaries of Christianity, who advance with schemes of religion in their hands, I will mention only two. The one is he, who disclaims all revelation; and bows down to the fantastic idol of moral fitness: an universal rule of action, as he represents it; and in all instances a sufficient one, as he affects to believe it. Under the other character are understood those, who beneath the mask of Christianity employ their secret efforts against it: who insiduously assume its name, and scarcely that;* who, while they say, Lord! Lord! are sedulously undermining that Lord's authority, dignity, and power. That advances against it, with the air and port of an open and avowed enemy: this enlists under its banner, only to

* In common with the Mahometans and Jews, the Socinians affect the appellation of UNITARIANS.

deceive;

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SERMON I.

deceive; thus employing againſt it the double powers of hoſtility and fraud: that bids bold defiance; this, like the falſe diſciple, betrays with a kiſs. We will examine the general features of each: their particular pretenſions will, in the courſe of the ſubſequent lectures, be with more minuteneſs inveſtigated.

By thoſe underminers of the Chriſtian Faith, it will be obvious to my audience, that I have in my eye the ſpawn of the antient Ebionites, the revived ſect of the Socinians; whoſe principal aim is not the denial of the Trinity, nor of the Divinity, nor Pre-exiſtence of Chriſt, nor of any other ſingle article of Chriſtianity: thoſe may be ſteps; but their maſked deſign is an object of larger extent. Some diſlike one goſpel, and ſome another; and of thoſe, which they admit, they hold themſelves at liberty to believe juſt as much as they pleaſe. They were firſt ſtiled Cerinthians, Ebionites, and Nazarenes: for thoſe ſeveral ſects, though

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though differing in appellation, ſprung up much about the ſame time, and in their fundamental doctrines were nearly the ſame. They acknowledged Jeſus to have been the Meſſiah; but acknowledged him, with that defective apprehenſion of his nature and dignity, characteriſed by our Lord himſelf; *ſeeing they ſaw, but did not perceive; and hearing, they heard, but did not underſtand.* The uniform tenor of the goſpel evinces a requiſition of faith greater than the bare acknowledgment, that Jeſus was the Meſſiah: his true diſciples were further required to believe him to be the Son of God. Thus when our Lord aſked them, whom they conceived him to be; Peter anſwered, *thou art Chriſt, the Son of the living God.* And at his trial the high prieſt in ſolemn terms adjured him to tell them, *whether he were Chriſt, the Son of God.* Hence we learn what was the true faith; and how far that of the Ebionites was defective. They admitted him to be the Meſſiah, but rejected the evangelical account of his

SERMON I.

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SERMON I. his Divinity: they pretended to believe him to have risen from the dead, but allowed him no more than human powers.

Those were the the tenets, on which modern Socinianism has been built: from its origin to the present day, a very contracted sect; and in the long succession of seventeen hundred years continually dying away, and reviving. Paul of Samosate, bishop and patriarch of Antioch, was their great luminary: with all the influence of his station, he propagated his doctrines; in which, finding himself resolutely opposed, he with all the meanness of a temporalist abjured them. The storm a little over, the restless spirit of innovation induced in him a second attempt to revive them: when the neighbouring bishops assembled themselves at Antioch; and, after a fair and candid discussion, unanimously condemned them: condemned those particular tenets, the denial of Christ's Divinity, and of his

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his deſcent from Heaven. And the opinion, the whole Chriſtian Church in that early age entertained of thoſe tenets, forms a powerful argument againſt them. SERMON I.

But I intend not in this diſcourſe a Hiſtory of Socinianiſm; and therefore paſs over Theodotus, Symmachus, Artemon, and others; even the great Socinus himſelf, a man of ſhrewd parts, but who wanted much the ballaſt of learning: only remarking, that the doctrines, to which thoſe Hereſiarchs objected, themſelves plainly ſaw were founded on the expreſs word of ſcripture; and therefore the ſcriptures, ſo aſſerting them, ſome rejected, and others endeavoured to explain away. But it is not the rejection of this, or that ſcripture doctrine, which will ſatisfy our modern Socinians: with affected regard for Chriſt, their brother, their teacher, and friend, they diſown him as their Lord; and of his ſupremacy and original reject his own account:

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SERMON I.

account: with pretended zeal for Chriſtianity, their inceſſant labours are directed to undermine the authority of thoſe ſcriptures, on which Chriſtianity is founded.

Compared with modern Socinians, the more decent Mr. Toland purſues the ſame point with modeſty and moderation. All that he contends for is, the right of *interpreting ſcripture figuratively, when occaſion requires it.** We ſee, to what this will lead: for, every one judging for himſelf of the neceſſity of ſuch figurative interpretation, both doctrines and precepts will be eaſily interpreted away. Toland however keeps up a ſhew of reverence for the authority of the ſcriptures. But what ſay our modern Socinians? Why truly, that the "*prodigious divine apparatus* of a particular "inſpiration of each ſacred writer [of "the Goſpels] was wholly unneceſſary."*

* Chriſtianity not myſterious.

" ry."* Of courſe it was not conferred, SERMON
or, in their own words, " this high I.
" notion of the inſpiration of the ſcrip-
" tures, of the Goſpel in particular, is
" contrary to fact."†

But though the goſpels were not dictated by particular inſpiration; " yet," ſays the author laſt quoted, " they may " be termed *in ſome degree* inſpired writ- " ings, as they contain a faithful detail " of the doctrine of Chriſt, which he " received immediately from God." Yes, admitting his repreſentation of them, they are juſt in ſuch degree inſpired, as other true hiſtorical details are. For, according to the account of Chriſt, which thoſe writers advance, where is the great difference between him and Socrates? They were both endowed by God with a greater degree of wiſdom, than other men poſſeſſed; for all wiſdom is from

* Prieſtley's Harmony of the Goſpels.
† Lindſey's Addreſs to the two Univerſities.

God:

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SERMON I.

God: neither of them left behind him any works of his own; and the Hiſtory of their Lives and Doctrines was each written by their reſpective diſciples. The goſpels therefore are juſt upon an equal footing of inſpiration with the dialogues of Plato. And the religion, which inſtead of ſtrict Chriſtianity is under theſe refinements propoſed, in its full extent amounts to theſe two points: the practice of the precepts of the goſpel, as far as, conſidered in the light of a ſyſtem of morals, we approve them; and a belief of its doctrines, ſo far as we may judge, the Evangeliſts "had been careful to put down, with fidelity and exactneſs, what they had ſeen and heard themſelves, reſpecting their *divine* maſter Jeſus," (the denial of whoſe *divinity* by the bye is an eſpecial tenet of the writer, I am now citing) "as alſo what they had learned from other competent witneſſes."*

* Lindſey's Addreſs, &c.

Here

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Here we ſee the deſign fairly unfolded; which, as far as its influence may extend, muſt weaken the obligation of the goſpel precepts, and effectually do its doctrines away: it fits thoſe to every conſcience, and invalidates the authority, that enforces theſe. Yet do the propagators of thoſe tenets aſſume the title of Chriſtians; open conventicles to the pretended honour of that Lord, whom they have thus degraded; and affect to form their religion on thoſe ſcriptures, they have robbed of the ſtrongeſt characteriſtic of truth.

Such is the unfixt, variable ſyſtem of faith and morals, which the Socinian holds forth. The Deiſt, more candid, as more open, denies all revelation; and affects to own no other law, than that of nature. He pretends the foundation of his religion to be laid in reaſon; and its rule of conduct to conſiſt in the direction of that reaſon, and the apparent aptitude and propriety of things. Mo-

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SERMON I.

ral fitneſs, the object of his idolatry, beckons him to paths which ſhe hath ſhaped; and which, ſhe promiſes, the conduct ſhe preſcribes will ſtrew with flowers. She tells him, the ſole end of man's exiſtence here is, like that of the Leviathan in the deep, *to ſport and take his paſtime therein*; ſhe bids him purſue and enjoy his own temporal happineſs; and, ſaving his own happineſs, to conſult for, and promote, the happineſs of others. She addreſſes him in the reprobated words of the apoſtle; *eat and drink, for to morrow we die.* Enjoy the good things of this world, while they are in thy power; for this end were ye placed here, for this end were they given: and who knows what a day may bring forth.

Palatable reaſoning this to the paſſions and appetites of human nature: and captivating the religion; which on ſuch eaſy terms makes both worlds our own! For moral fitneſs, that meaſures duty by the line of reaſon, which again is regulated, or at leaſt ſtrongly influenced, by inclination,

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inclination, will eaſily perſuade her votary; that by employing his ſuperfluities on objects in need, by dealing out his bread to the hungry, and cloathing the naked wanderer, he purchaſes a licence to indulge himſelf in whatever practices his reaſon, thus biaſſed by appetite, may ſeem to ſanction. He may laugh at ſuperſtition and indulgences: but were matters fairly and honeſtly explained; it would be difficult to determine, in favour of which the divine voice of wiſdom may decide.

The practice of a warm and diffuſive benevolence is certainly a duty, highly incumbent on us to diſcharge: yet are we not to lay the whole ſtreſs of religion on it. Chriſtianity repreſents it as only one part, and the inferior part too, of *the law and the prophets:* and reaſon taught the heathen, that, apart from the ſocial and relative duties, there is a duty and ſervice owing only, and immediately, to God. The duty of benevolence claims

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SERMON I.

our regard, even as an act of religion; but not exclusively: it demands our observance; but not to the neglect of equally, or perhaps more, important ones. It is among the *things, which ought to be done*, but on account of which *others are not to be left undone.*

There is however a brilliancy, it must be acknowledged, in this fashionable religion; which is made to consist in a discrimination of moral rectitude, and a cultivation of the relative and social duties, particularly that of charity. It lays hold on our tendereſt affections, it interests mankind in its favour, it *covers*, not compensates for, but conceals, or hides, *a multitude* of *sins*.

The passage just cited, men, whose religion sits easy on them, those good casuists, who would secure to themselves the next world, without giving up the pleasures of this, are very apt through ignorance to mistake, or misrepresent through

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through design: from thence alledging the sanction of scriptural authority, to justify a kind of commutation for sin. Whereas the apostle's intention, in the use of the expression, being to inculcate the practice of brotherly love and charity, which our Lord and Master had particularly pressed upon his disciples, declaring it should be a badge of their discipleship, he makes use of that strong expression; only as intimating, that it was a virtue of so bright and luminous a nature, as would attract the notice, and conciliate the good opinion of mankind, hiding by its lustre a multitude of little faults. SERMON I.

Take reason, or revelation for your guide; and you will find both the one, and the other, inculcate our duty to God, as the first and great duty: yet doth this favourite religion of the Deist, with all the social virtues in its train, leave it entirely out of the question. "Quod "supra nos, nihil ad nos;" is an apho-

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SERMON I.

riſm ever in the mouth of thoſe, who own no other religion than that. And thus, under the affectation of honouring the Deity by a diſtant humility, they are led to regard Him with indifference and neglect. "He is too elevated," reaſon they, "for us reptiles of a day "even in thought to approach him. "We are arguing in the dark, when "we diſpute about his nature and at- "tributes: and without being acquain- "ted with his nature and attributes, we "cannot acceptably worſhip Him: but "not to worſhip Him acceptably and in "truth, is falſe religion: and falſe reli- "gion is worſe than no religion at all."

But this fluent train of argument is falſe in every article. In giving us reaſon to diſcover that there is ſuch a Being as God, our Creator hath declared it a duty to employ our thoughts on Him: and however little He hath been pleaſed to diſcover of Himſelf; that little it is the higheſt prerogative of our nature

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nature to look up to, and the moſt glorious exerciſe of the intellectual faculties to inveſtigate. Nor are we on this ſubject ſo much in the dark, as ſcepticiſm may pretend: want of demonſtration is no proof of falſhood; nor ought it to be any diſcouragement to the purſuit of truth. Without that perfect comprehenſion of the divine nature, which human preſumption may demand; it is aſſerted, that we may pay to our Creator a reaſonable ſervice: and it is denied, that a falſe religion is worſe than no religion at all. It may be ſo; but not neceſſarily. Conſidered in itſelf, and apart from the accidental malignity of its tenets, even a falſe religion is as much more acceptable to God, than no religion whatever; as an imperfect endeavour to pleaſe, is preferable to non-exertion and neglect. In a word, the knowledge of God, which, imperfect as it is, He hath ſtamped upon the human mind, ſufficiently evinces; that to contemplate Him, to acquaint ourſelves with Him,

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SERMON I.

in order to inveſtigate how in the moſt acceptable manner to ſerve Him, is not above us: it is a duty incumbent on us; it produces in us a love of Him, and fulfils the firſt command.

If the excellent wiſdom of that full and perfect religion, which in doctrine and precept the goſpel exhibits, we contraſt with the two ſubſtitutes of it above deſcribed; we ſhall find it neither vague, nor defective. In reſpect of our duty to God, it teaches; that to *love him with all our heart, and all our ſoul, and with all our mind, and with all our ſtrength*; and agreeably to ſuch an inflamed, enlarged affection, to ſerve Him; is the firſt obligation of man. And for the regulation of our conduct to our neighbour, a proper diſcharge of the ſocial and relative duties, it lays down the completeſt rules in the ſhorteſt compaſs. "To love our neighbour, as ourſelves;" and "to do "to all men, as we would they ſhould "do unto us;" are maxims, that form the

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the ground work of the beſt and completeſt ſyſtem of Ethics, moral philoſophy ever framed. SERMON I.

Its doctrines are authoritative and expreſs; its precepts clear and obligatory. However mens appetites, inclinations, humours, or caprice, may differ and vary; true religion will be always the ſame: a perfect unchangeable rule of action. And though its precepts and doctrines we may pervert and wreſt; we muſt take heed, that in ſo doing, we wreſt them not to our own deſtruction. Plain and ſimple in its inſtitution, it ſeeks no adventitious colourings; free from defects, it eludes not ſcrutiny, nor ſhuns the light: but the more we ſee, and know, and are acquainted with it, the more deſireable doth it appear to us.

Reaſon is the touchſtone, on which the truth of religion is to be tried. Let the Mahometan ſay, BELIEVE: and guard the ſacred Koran from the ſcrupulous

SERMON I.

pulous eye of rational enquiry. Chriſt hath ſaid, *ſearch the ſcriptures; for they are they, which teſtify of me.* And never have books been more critically, and more enviouſly ſearched, than they: while from thoſe trials they have acquired new ſtrength; riſing from the fiery ordeals with all the acquiſition of luſtre, trial and truth can give. The religion, which declines an appeal to the tribunal of reaſon, is always to be ſuſpected. To her the Chriſtian commits the guidance of his faith: her ſacred principles will ſupport its authority, when from the faſtidious countenance of Deiſm the veil of prejudice ſhall drop; and the inſidious ſchemes of modern refiners ſhall, like air-blown bubbles, float for their moment, amuſe light minds, and die away: when unſtable notions, and vain conceits, by wild imaginations ſuggeſted, and through love of novelty entertained, ſhall by ſober judgment be weighed, and in the cool hour of reflection relinquiſhed. Schemes of religion, ſuch

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ſuch as theſe, may continue for a time; but, for want of a ſolid foundation, at length the baſeleſs fabric muſt fall.

I. On theſe principles, in the diſcourſes, which on the preſent occaſion engage my attention, my deſign is, by a chain of arguments deduced from the foundation of all religion, the divine exiſtence, ſummarily to evince the ground and credibility of the Revelation of Jeſus Chriſt. In proof of that firſt great truth, the Being of a God, I ſhall have little occaſion to dwell on arguments againſt the direct Atheiſt: the fool, who *ſays in his heart, there is no God.* I ſhall content myſelf therefore with advancing ſuch only, as may be moſt ſatisfactory and convincing: and paſs on 2dly to him, who, acknowledging the Being of a God, by a denial of miracles doth in effect limit his power; a ſpecies of Anti-Theiſm ſcarcely leſs wicked, than direct Atheiſm itſelf. And I will 3dly advert to that more refined Atheiſt; whoſe

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SERMON I. whoſe deſperate principles of Material-iſm tend to degrade the Divine nature.

II. From the evidence of God's exiſtence, we will proceed to the proofs of his ſuperintending providence; a particular, as well as general, providence: that is, a providence, which not only directs and upholds the world in that ordinary courſe of nature, that ſucceſſion of general cauſes and effects, which was in the firſt arrangement of things eſtabliſhed; but ſuch as with all-pervading eye obſerves, and guiding hand directs each leſſer movement; every minute occurrence, as well as every extraordinary event.

III. And from theſe adduced proofs of God's exiſtence and providence, I infer the duty of religion: that is, the proper acknowledgment of God's creative power, and upholding goodneſs, by acts of adoration and praiſe; obligatory on

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on all beings endowed with a degree of reaſon, equal to that of man. SERMON I.

IV. But though reaſon be thus competent to point out the neceſſity of religion; facts and experience evince its inſufficiency to direct us aright in its doctrines and precepts, and the purity of worſhip: from whence follows the neceſſity of a Revelation.

V. And on this ſubject I ſhall confine my thoughts to the nature and extent of the Revelation made to the Jews: the completion and perfection of which were deſtined in the Meſſiah.

VI. In examining the ancient prophecies of the Meſſiah, my principal object will be to note and illuſtrate thoſe particulars, in which the Jews had miſtaken and miſinterpreted them: not only in referring to worldly conqueſts, pomp, and power, deſcriptions, which with no human character could comport;

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SERMON I.

port; but in their groſs miſapprehenſion of thoſe prophecies alſo, which as plainly allude to his humiliated and ſuffering ſtate. And as thoſe contraſting prophecies never did meet in any other of their great characters, nor ever can, but in one, who lived the life, performed the miracles, and experienced the ſufferings, which Jeſus did: they will not only demonſtrate, that he was the Meſſiah; but as aſſuredly prove, that he poſſeſſed powers more than human, and exerciſed an authority, that marked his origin, as his miſſion, divine.

VII. From the authorities of the Old Teſtament, reſpecting the nature and dignity of the Meſſiah, I propoſe to purſue my inveſtigation of the ſubject through the Scriptures of the New; and therein to enquire, 1ſt, what is the general ſcope, and uniform tenour of thoſe ſcriptures, reſpecting the Pre-exiſtence and Divinity of Chriſt: and 2dly to meet the objections to thoſe doctrines in

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in the full force, in which the leaders of a revived ſect have preſſed them. And in this inquiry may the ſpirit of truth direct me, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord: &c. &c.

SERMON

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SERMON II.

ROM. i. 10, &c.

For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; even his eternal power and Godhead.

SERMON II.

THE existence of God is so clearly manifested, and his creative power so far understood, saith the apostle; that even the Heathen are without excuse, in not paying Him that purity of worship, which his sublime nature and Godhead require. And indeed reason doth supply us with so cogent arguments of such a being, and those attributes of infinite power, wisdom and goodness, inseparable from Him, which St. Paul stiles

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ſtiles "the inviſible things of God"; as nothing but the moſt determined prejudices can withſtand. SERMON II.

One would conceive that we need but open our eyes on the fair frame of things about us, and queſtion our hearts how came they here: and our hearts would anſwer, *this hath God done; perceiving that it was his work.* The Atheiſt however hath diſcovered the way of making a world, without calling to his aſſiſtance the power and wiſdom of God.

"Nullam rem e nihilo gigni divinitus unquam;"

is the principle, on which he proceeds to erect his ſpecious building: how far it may be admitted, we will in the ſequel examine.

I. If at the firſt, or from eternity, NOTHING exiſted; there never could have exiſted any thing: ſo far juſt and

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SERMON II.

true is the position above assumed. SOMETHING therefore existed from all eternity.

That SOMETHING was either matter; or a substance different from matter. Inertion being an essential property of matter, mere matter could never have produced itself; for self-existence implies activity: it could not have produced itself even in a Chaotic, shapeless mass. Something therefore must from eternity have existed, possest of active and higher powers, than matter possesses. That SOMETHING we stile God.

But admitting for a moment the former supposition, and conceiving of matter, as an eternal existence; from whence shall we suppose it to have derived those beautiful and varying shapes, which we now behold? On the most favourable supposition of its origin, a rude, indigested mass; from whence did it become possest of its power of diversifying its motions and operations in such

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such a manner, as to produce the wonderful variety of beings, that are found scattered upon the face of the earth? SERMON II.

The atomists saw the defect of this scheme of Atheism: and therefore to self-existent matter they gave a power, which does not belong to it; they conferred motion on it, and introduced a million of self-existent, dancing atoms: a system of heathen philosophy, which, however blazoned with the ornaments of verse, is much of a piece with that of their theology; both highly poetic: and, notwithstanding the encomium, with which a modern historian of no small name hath distinguished the *pretty* theology of Julian,* both exceedingly absurd.

Necessary self-existence is the prime attribute of the Deity: something self-

* Gibbon's History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.

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SERMON II.

existent is God. A million therefore of self-existing, self-moving atoms, are a million of Gods. And when those millions of atoms had danced themselves into shapeable existences, seas, rivers, mountains, trees, and the like: it was natural enough for the plastic powers of poetic imagination, to personify those eternal existences; who, according to the scheme of Epicurean philosophy, were Deities ready made to their hand: and hence, their Oreades, Naiades, &c. their Gods and Goddesses, of land, and of rivers, and even of the bowels of the earth.

But supposing for a moment the existence of motion, without admitting a mover: there is still wanting design. For a fortuitous dance of atoms is no more equal to the creation of a world, in which there are such marks of infinite wisdom, harmony, and design, as this of ours displays: than a fortuitous jumble of letters, to the composition of an epic

epic poem; or of colours, to the delineation of a regular picture. For on the moſt advantageous idea of what matter is, and motion can do: that is no more than an inert, chaotic, maſs; and this a blind impulſe, eternally proceeding without deſtination. SERMON II.

To make one conceſſion further, and ſuppoſe, upon another ſyſtem of Atheiſm, matter to have eternally exiſted in the beautiful variety of ſhape and form, in which we now behold it; without ſome external ſupport, all thoſe beautiful appearances of things muſt long ago have ſunk into their original nothing. For matter, ſuch as the world is compoſed of, being in itſelf liable to corruption, and ſtate ſubſtances, as well as inanimate, having all their riſe, their progreſs, and decay; their ſelf-exiſtence does not imply a greater degree of abſurdity, than their ſelf-ſupport from all eternity in the ſame form and ſtate.

SERMON II.

From this view of the incompetence of matter, considered in every light, to self-existence and eternity, we must admit some superior principle; and acknowledge an eternal self-existent cause: something of power to create matter, which in itself possesses no active powers, consequently not the power of self-existence: an existent cause, possessing also wisdom and design, equal to the diversification observable in this fair frame of things about us. And that being is God.

To this beauty, order, and regularity, so discernible in the universe, the apostle in my text particularly appeals; in proof of the existence and perfections of the Deity. And if this argument could be thought to want any corroborative; I might instance the universal consent of mankind, in all ages of the world, and in every region: which concurrence of assent must be a strong presumption of truth.

For

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For it contradicts every principle of reaſon, to imagine that by the conſtitution of human nature falſe principles ſhould have been generally and uniformly infuſed into our minds; and that we ſhould be naturally inclined to error: that, in this great truth of God's exiſtence, the whole world ſhould be taught to err; except the few, whoſe intereſt it may be, to wiſh the doctrine falſe, that they may live to the full enjoyment of their appetites and inclinations, without the moleſtation of conſcience, and the alarms of fear. Nor can any other certain and general cauſe be aſſigned for ſo general an opinion, except the nature of the human mind: which hath this notion of a Deity born with it; and, as we may thence conclude, ſtamped upon it by the author of nature, the Deity himſelf. But I forbear to purſue this argument; or to dwell longer on this part of my ſubject: haſtening to the ſecond propoſition; which was to reconcile the ſuperſedure

SERMON II.

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SERMON II. of the general laws of nature, in the case of miracles, with the wisdom and goodness of that infinite being, who to the operation of nature assigned those laws.

II. To acknowledge a Deity, and yet tie Him down by suppositions, which, if pushed to their utmost length, would leave Him with limited powers; is to throw over Atheism so thin a veil, as hides nothing of it, but its name. This however is the tendency of an argument against the reality of miracles, which has been maintained with the greatest confidence; and is founded on the *impossibility* of them, consistent with the attributes of the Deity. A miracle being a supersedure or alteration of the established course of nature, it is contended; that if such alteration be for the better, the course of nature was not originally established with infinite wisdom; if for the worse, it is an alteration not consistent with infinite goodness.

This

This argument, for it is a favourite one, hath been offered in another form, and with a happy change of words. "God," it is argued "cannot ſuperſede "the courſe of things, he has eſtabliſh-"ed, without violating the laws of "nature." The word, *violate*, adds no new force to the argument: but it is aptly calculated to fling imputed cenſure on the oppoſite opinion: as maintaining the reality of thoſe extraordinary operations, at the expence of violating the ſacred laws of God and nature. Sermon III.

In form more full, and ſtronger terms, I offer the argument; in the direct words of a celebrated eſſay, by zealous partizans ſtill dealt out in detail, and held up in triumph. "A miracle is a "violation of the laws of nature: and "as a firm and unalterable experience "hath eſtabliſhed theſe laws, the proof "againſt a miracle, from the very na-"ture of the fact, is as intire, as any

"argument

SERMON II. "argument from experience can be "poſſibly imagined." *

The firſt part of the propoſition, it is plain to obſerve, is an aſſertion without proof: unleſs the ſubſequent clauſe be intended to ſubſtantiate one, in the aſſumption, that *firm and unalterable experience hath eſtabliſhed theſe laws.* But *firm and unalterable* experience conſtitutes ſuch proof no longer, than till theſe laws are ſuperſeded; and then *firm and unalterable* experience proves in particular caſes and for ſpecial purpoſes, a deviation from thoſe general laws. And ſuch deviation is as ſtrongly eſtabliſhed by *firm and unalterable experience*, as the former regularity itſelf. Nor can it, being God's immediate operation, or at leaſt an act under his permiſſion, with more propriety be ſtiled a violation of the laws of nature; than the mountainous waves of the ſea, proudly overleap-

* See Hume's Eſſay on Miracles.

ing

ing the bounds which He had ſet them, deluging whole regions, and ingulphing cities, — or the dark ſpots, which aſtronomers obſerve increaſingly to incruſt the bright orb of the ſun, in poſſible diminution both of its heat and light, — can be charged on his works, as violations of the general laws, He had aſſigned to their operation. SERMON II.

He, that had a power to direct nature according to certain general laws, muſt alſo have a power to control, and alter her movements. And ſuch alteration, or control, is as much the act, either mediately or immediately, of infinite power and wiſdom, as the general law itſelf. It is a part of that general law; which was formed with ſuch a ſpecific deviation. Whatever weight therefore may be aſcribed to this argument; it in reality poſſeſſes none. It ſtands not in our way in proof, that ſuch ſuperſedure of the general laws of nature is impoſſible; as being incompatible either with infinite wiſdom or power. The only queſtion

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SERMON II. question then is, whether human testimony be sufficient to prove it: which will fall under an article of future discussion; being a point of enquiry, with which in the present case we are not concerned. Nothing more is in this state of the subject contended for; than that God can supersede the general laws of nature, without incurring the rash imputation of violating them.

But the author was led into this argument, by narrow notions of the divine agency. He has adverted to the Deity, as an artist; and to the structure of this world, as a complicated machine, of his framing; consisting of a variety of mechanic powers, which he puts into motion, assigning general movements to every distinct part; turns the piece of finished mechanism out of his hands, and leaves it in its various parts, to pursue its destined operations: which it will invariably perform, unless some derangement of the parts impede and interrupt

terrupt its motions. Now were this representation of the Deity adequate and just; the argument adduced must be admitted of no inconsiderable weight. For as the great machine must have come out of the hands of its Creator perfectly good, and was left without further attention to continue the course, He had prescribed to it; every deviation from the order and course, He had so prescribed, would be a deterioration of his work.

But doth such an idea comport with the Creator of heaven and earth? And indeed what human idea will? Certainly however the idea of God, at first creating and giving movements to the world, and then leaving it to pursue those motions no longer under his inspection, without his farther regard, without support; — such idea doth surely ill suit the attributes of omniscience and omnipresence. In his operations he knows neither beginning, middle, nor end.

With

SERMON II.

With Him no diſtance diſtinguiſhes time or place: He looks neither backwards nor forwards; the idea of FIRST, or LAST, notes not his actions: who is always, every where; and at one comprehenſive glance views every minute movement of every part of his innumerable works, in every period of their operations.

When at the firſt, if, in application to God, we may properly uſe ſuch a term as FIRST, He made the element of water yield to the impreſſion of the human ſtep; He made it alſo on a particular occaſion to reſiſt it: and the one particular occaſional power was as much the given power of God, and as early given, as the other. And this given power to that part of nature, which performs it, is his law. With the ſame almighty FIAT, which put the world in motion, He for a moment ſtopped the movements of ſome of its parts. At the ſame moment, He ſaw them perform their accuſtomed

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tomed revolutions, and ſaw them halt: when, in ſcripture language, *the ſun ſtood ſtill on Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon.* At the ſame inſtant, and with the ſame glance, he ſees the ſun travelling in his ſtrength, and the moon's reflected beams enlivening the gloom of night; and alſo beholds, at the deſtined period of their diſſolution, the one *turned into blood*, and the face of the *other darkened:* His hand alike directs both operations. Reſpecting Him, with whom time is not, when we ſpeak of periods and of times; we ſhould keep ever in mind, that we uſe thoſe terms, becauſe we know not how to expreſs our ideas of Him more ſuitably. But thus far our ideas of God may attain: that acting always, as He demonſtratively does, and preſent every where, as He neceſſarily is, when the operations of nature are moſt eccentric, equally as when moſt regular, they perform the divine will: and the unerring rectitude, with which He rules, or ſtops,

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SERMON II.

her motions, ever preſerves the courſe, that nature may purſue, from the imputation of VIOLATION.

III. The point, which under the article of God's exiſtence I propoſed in the third and laſt place to conſider, was the general principle of Materialiſm: as of tendency to degrade the divine nature. For when we magnify matter above its juſt claim and pretenſions, and aſcribe to it perfections, which it doth not poſſeſs; when we attribute to it perception, memory, reflection, thoſe intellectual faculties, a ray of divinity, if indeed the image of God be in any degree ſtamped upon us: we muſt take care we be not led ſtep by ſtep, at laſt to degrade the divine nature, and materialiſe even the Deity himſelf.

That ſuch dangerous tendency in the principles of materialiſm is not matter of vain preſumption, but of fact; the direct acknowledgment of one of the moſt

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most determined materialists of this age evinces; who observes, that "the doc- SERMON II.
"trine of the materiality of man has "been charged with leading to Athe- "ism."* And then in the very same work, while he affects to remove, he proceeds to establish, the charge: employing two sections to prove, that "the nature "of the Deity is material." The antient philosophy of Epicurus conferred motion on self-existent matter: the modern materialist, more bountiful, endows it with perceptive and intellectual powers. If that were Atheism; I fear this will rank little lower. Such principles, if they lead men to conceive of God, not as he is, but *turn the glory of God into a corruptible nature*, are equally derogatory from the sublime nature of the Deity, as direct Atheism itself. And the author's candid acknowledgment of the existence of such a charge is, on the subject we are now investigating, sufficient to justify

* Priestley's Disquisitions on Matter and Spirit.

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SERMON II.

my endeavours to guard againſt principles of ſo deſperate tendency.

The chain of reaſoning, on which the Materialiſt proceeds, ſuppoſes, that to enable one being to act upon another, they muſt each poſſeſs ſome common property: the mind therefore, if qualified to act upon the body, muſt have ſome common property of matter; and for the ſame reaſon ſo muſt the Deity himſelf. But what has the properties of matter, is matter. This is in brief the argument in ſupport of the doctrine of materialiſm: and ſuch is the deſperate length, to which it goes.

Let us examine this train of reaſoning, and argue on the fact in the extreme: let us ſuppoſe the truth of the concluſion, that the Deity poſſeſſes ſome property common to matter; and aſk what known property it is. Not inertion, moſt aſſuredly: for every attribute of the Deity implies activity. Not ſolidity:

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dity: for in Him, whether the Chriſtian's God, or the heathen philoſopher's anima mundi, *we live, and move, and have our being*. Not ſhape: for that has bounds. In ſhort, not any property of matter, that can be aſcertained. Every power of the mind, and every property obſervable in matter, are ſo eſſentially different; that the idea of homogeneity in the two ſubſtances is too extravagant to be admitted on any other ground, than a direct proof of the impoſſibility of the action of ſpirit on matter, without the exiſtence of ſome common property. Our incapacity to comprehend in what manner ſuch action, ſo circumſtanced, can be exerted, is not ſufficient, againſt every appearance that it is ſo, to deſtroy the poſſibility of the fact. SERMON II.

Yet however bold the aſſertion is, that ſpirit *cannot* act upon matter without poſſeſſing ſome common property of it; and however falſe it may be: it muſt with proper diffidence be acknowledged,

SERMON II.

ed, that it is difficult to conceive how thought can come into immediate contact with a ſubſtance ſo apparently oppoſite to it, as matter. But humbly conſidering how little we know of the laws, by which God governs the world; though ignorant of the cauſe, may we not, inſtructed by the effect, ſuppoſe ſome ſecret law of nature exiſting, ſome fine link between the two ſubſtances, by which the mind may receive its ſenſations and ideas; and through which it may exerciſe its operations, excite motions, and perform actions? We know, in the chain of material beings how nice the links of nature; we know, how nearly the quadruped approaches the feathered tribe; how nearly the inhabitant of the watery element him, that grazes on the plain; the vegetative the animal being. And I conceive it not improbable, much leſs impoſſible, which is ſufficient to urge againſt a direct impoſſibility; that there may be ſome fine link between the material and the immaterial world, ſome

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ſome medium of action, which, if known, would ſatisfy the doubts of philoſophic arrogance. SERMON II.

My deſign in this diſcourſe has been, to eſtabliſh the proof of God's exiſtence, as the foundation of all religion: and with all humility ſo far to inveſtigate the Divine nature, as forming an object of religious worſhip; of that pure form of worſhip eſpecially, the truth of which in the ſequel of theſe diſcourſes I ſhall proceed to evince. And if the reflections on this ſubject, which I have now offered, have any weight; they will conduce to mould our minds to the ſtudy of ourſelves. And when, convinced of our own weakneſs and imperfection, we raiſe our thoughts to the contemplation of the Deity; we ſhall, from what we are, from what we feel within, and behold without us, derive irrefragable and increaſing proofs of his exiſtence. We ſhall learn to think humbly of ourſelves, and exaltedly of

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SERMON II.

that infinitely perfect and adorable Being, who called us from nothing; and gave us all that we at present enjoy, or in reversion hope for. And when the enlarged mind expatiates on his power; we shall tremble at the idea of fixing any thing like a limit to it: when we endeavour to search into the inscrutable treasures of his wisdom; we shall exert every fertile power of imagination, to admire and revere it: and when we presume to employ our thoughts on his nature; we shall separate from it every idea, that suits not with the highest excellence we can attribute to the most sublime and exalted Being: and after all this stretch of heart, and soul, and strength, to think worthily of Him, we shall have to lament the weakness of our conception, and the imperfection of our ideas; satisfied that, high as the enraptured mind can raise them, they fall beneath, infinitely beneath, the elevated subject, on which they are employed.

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SERMON III.

Job, xxxi. 4.

Doth He not ſee my ways, and count all my ſteps?

FROM the evidence of God's exiſtence, which was the ſubject of my laſt diſcourſe; we will now proceed to the proofs, we have of his providence. It has been ſhewn, that the world is the production of a Being infinite in wiſdom and power, whom we ſtile God: the point of doctrine next to be proved is, that this World, this whole ſyſtem of created things, is ſuper-intended, governed, and directed by that Almighty God, who made it. And indeed there is SERMON III.

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SERMON III.

such a natural and neceſſary connection between the belief of God's exiſtence, and ſuperintendence; that he, who believes the one, would he think conſiſtently, muſt believe the other likewiſe. If we believe there is a God, who made the world; we muſt likewiſe believe that the ſame God, who made the world, doth govern it too. For matter is as incompetent to ſupport it's own exiſtence, as to create itſelf; nor is chance better qualified to govern a world, than to make one: and we have already ſeen, how unapt matter is for the active office of creation; and how unequal chance is to the formation of a world, which diſplays ſuch harmony, regularity, and conſiſtence. But from appearances let us proceed to proofs.

The power of God, diſplayed in the government of the world, may be conſidered in a double view:

First,

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First, in respect to the material world; in which He is acknowledged as ordering, and directing the changes and revolutions of nature: His will, and governing power, being the universal law, which it observes.

And secondly we may consider the superintendence of God, as displayed in a moral and religious view; in His dispensations and government, respecting the rational world: including the general state, œconomy, and conduct of mankind. And under this head I propose a further enquiry into the reality of a particular, as well as general, providence: addressed to the consideration of those, who, under the affectation of enlarged ideas of the Divine nature, pretend to suppose it an opinion unworthy of Him, to ascribe to his immediate interposition occurrences, which are sometimes stiled providential; but which, though apparently extraordinary, fall within the common course prescribed to nature, however

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SERMON III. however hidden from us, and secret may be the immediate causes of them.

I. First, then, the general notion of providence is God's care of all the creatures He has made; which must consist in preserving and upholding their beings and natures, and in such acts of government, as the good order of the world, the arrangement of things, their secret dependencies, and correspondent effects require. And that there is such a manifest general ordination and adaptation of things in the natural world, that they exactly suit the purposes of each other, and contribute mutually to the universal good of the great whole; that the common necessities of mankind are graciously provided for, and supplied in the usual course of things, and according to the general laws of nature, which infinite wisdom and goodness originally established; that the heavenly bodies are constituted, and their movements directed, with exact proportion to one another in their

their ſeveral ſtations and circuits; are truths, that have with ſuitable expreſſions of admiration been obſerved and acknowledged by thoſe, who have penetrated fartheſt into ſtudies and enquiries of that kind. SERMON III.

When we proceed to a more particular inveſtigation of this intereſting doctrine of a divine providence, the mind is ſtruck with the obſerved ſubſiſtence of things in the ſame ſtructure; and with the ſame progreſſion, through the ſeveral ages of their being. In this conſideration is involved a two-fold circumſtance; their ſtability, and their arrangement: the one inconceivable without active intelligence, and the other without ſupport.

Though neither matter, nor motion, nor both united, have been found in themſelves competent to the creation of the world: there can be no doubt, but, under the direction of the Divine architect,

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SERMON III.

tect, they conſtitute the compoſition of the viſible univerſe. It was not therefore wonderful, that ſome philoſophers ſhould have conferred on them the principle of ſelf-exiſtence: and it was conſiſtent with ſuch opinion, to attribute to them the powers of conſervation and ſupport. But from the idea of matter, attenuate and modify it as you will, inactivity, it has been already obſerved, is inſeparable. If therefore eſſentially paſſive, and conſequently not ſelf-exiſtent, but created; impotent to produce, it muſt be equally impotent to preſerve itſelf. For in reality how doth production differ from preſervation, except as an act exerted from its continuance? One moment of active being implies, in an inert maſs, as conſiderable a difficulty as another. It requires the ſame power to confirm a ſecond moment of action, as to aſſign a firſt; a third, as a ſecond: and ſo on through all the parts of duration. And if ſo, from the ſame principle muſt be derived the continuance of

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of the world's exiſtence, as the origin of it. SERMON III.

In the ſame manner with regard to motion; we cannot conceive of it, without admitting a cauſe. From a blind and ſenſeleſs cauſe can proceed only a blind and indefinite effect: that is, in the preſent inſtance a tendency every way; which is plainly equivalent to a tendency no way, or to reſt. A tendency, in any given or definite way, denotes ſelection and direction; and theſe again, immediately or ultimately, an external intelligent mover. How then can that, which could neither begin, nor guide, continue itſelf? There is beſides in every impulſe a diminution of motion: ſo that whatever momentum is communicated to the body impelled, re-action is known to take from the impellent. What then can repair this continual loſs; or, in other words, ſupport a conſtant motion, like the revolutions of the globe in one regular tenor; except an inceſſant

SERMON III.

ceſſant action: which brings us at once to the inceſſant intervention of a ſuperintending Deity?

Let us next advert to the additional circumſtance of arrangement. Survey, and it is a delightful entertainment to ſurvey, the productions and proviſions of nature: you will perceive on the firſt obſervation variety, curioſity, co-operation, and mutual ſubſervience; ſucceſſions without failure, greatneſs without diſproportion, complication without confuſion. Obſerve particularly the nice diſpoſition of the univerſe, of which this orb of ours forms a part; the diſtribution of the larger planets in wider and remoter orbits, that their gravity may not interfere with the ſafety or velocity of the ſmaller; the meaſured diſtance of the earth from the ſun, whoſe approach or recedure with any ſenſible variation might endanger its being, or all its comforts.

Then

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Then let us bring our reflections nearer home; and obſerve this globe of earth that we inhabit, and its productions. What an elegant and beneficial aſſemblage do we behold ſpringing from mere mould, a cold, lumpiſh, crumbling ſubſtance; not grateful to any ſenſe, nor poſſeſſed in appearance of any prolific virtue! With what exquiſite art, accommodating ſtructure to character and exertion, are particular creatures organiſed; ſeverally deſtined to form and fill up a compact, regular, and complete ſyſtem: a ſyſtem, the compoſition of which conſiſting of materials infinitely numerous, infinitely diverſified, hath ſtood for near ſix thouſand years one and the ſame; uninjured in its form, unimpaired in its parts, unobſtructed in its movements! Conſider this complex wonder; and who can heſitate to conclude, that every thing is ſuſtained, guided, and uniformly reinſtated, by a vigilant providence, "great in council, and mighty in work."

SERMON III.

For

SERMON III.

For in ſhort wherever there is an effect, it muſt have a cauſe anſwerable; a determinate effect, a determining cauſe; a perpetual or periodical effect, a permanent one. Thus order implies deſign, ſymmetry contrivance, beauty workmanſhip, regularity guidance, unerring regularity wiſdom, limitation influence, utility forecaſt. And all theſe, exiſting in infinite circumſtances, declare an infinite mind, operating in the appointment of them with infinite diſcernment, and in the preſervation of them with infinite attention; which is in other words, a preſiding providence. On this ſubject engaged, one cannot help giving ſcope to imagination, and reflecting on the infinite pleaſure it will give the enlarged mind, when admitted to a nearer view of things, than our converſe in this world admits, to explore the curioſities and exhauſtleſs wonders of nature: to view, with what art and contrivance each particular creature is made; and how the ſeveral parts of this great

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great machine are fitted to each other, and continue on from generation to generation a regular and uniform world. Mutually connected and dependent, each is fitted to the uſes and purpoſes of their ſeveral natures, all ſerviceable and aſſiſtant to one another, and every individual neceſſary to the whole. SERMON III.

On ſuch a ſurvey, to matter and motion, to every cauſe a fertile imagination can ſuggeſt, analogy will force us to add deſign. For by a fortuitous concourſe of things we ſee nothing regular effected in works of art: by what rule of reaſoning then are we to expect it in the operations of nature? And with deſign, we muſt admit of a deſigner: that is, a Being of wiſdom, to plan; and of power, the extent of which we meaſure by the execution of the plan. In nature's works conſider the deſign, and examine the execution of it; and impute them, who can, to leſs than infinite wiſdom and power. Such were the reflections, which, Claudian tells us, cured his

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SERMON III.

doubts reſpecting a ſuperintending providence: the deſcription is elegant, and the reaſoning juſt; with that deſcription, the elegance of the paſſage, and the propriety of ſentiment it conveys, will I truſt plead my excuſe for concluding the argument drawn from obſervations on the material world.

" Sæpe * mihi dubiam traxit ſententia mentem,
" Curarent ſuperi terras, an nullus ineſſet
" Rector, & incerto fluerent mortalia caſu.
" Aſt cum diſpoſiti quæſiſſem fœdera mundi,
" Præſcriptoſque mari fines, anniſque meatus,
" Et lucis noctiſque vices; tunc omnia rebar
" Conſilio firmata Dei, qui lege moveri
" Sidera, qui fruges diverſo tempore naſci,
" Qui variam Phœben alieno juſſerit igne
" Compleri, Solemque ſuo; porrexerit undis
" Littora; tellurem medio libraverit axe."

CLAUD. in Ruf. lib. iii.

II. I proceed 2dly to conſider the ſuperintendence of God as diſplayed in a moral

* Oft have I doubted, whether power divine
Direct this world with wiſdom and deſign;

Or

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moral and religious view, in his diſpenſations and government, reſpecting the rational world; including the general ſtate, œconomy, and conduct of mankind. SERMON III.

And in this diſcuſſion the firſt great argument, that offers, is the general adminiſtration of the world in favour of virtue. Vice is not always puniſhed here, nor virtue always rewarded; nor indeed ought it to be ſo: for then this world would be a ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; and not, as it is, a ſtate

Or all things riſe, decay, recede, advance,
Cauſe and effect the random work of chance.
But when the frame of nature meets my mind,
It's various links harmoniouſly combined;
The bounds, that check the ocean's wild career,
The deſtined periods of the meaſured year;
The brightly-beaming day, the ſcowling night,
Succeeding darkneſs, and returning light:
My doubts are baniſh'd, 'gainſt each vain ſurmiſe,
GOD ſtands reveal'd, all-mighty, and all-wiſe.
By Him the bounties of the earth are given,
He framed the laws, that rule the orbs of heaven:
He bade the ocean, keep its channell'd place,
He hung the well-poiſed world in empty ſpace.

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SERMON III.

of trial and probation: and thus would one of the cleareſt and ſtrongeſt arguments in proof of a future ſtate be taken away. But though there be wiſe reaſons, why ſome virtuous men ſhould be unhappy in this life, and ſome vicious men proſperous; for this world not being a place of judgment, but a ſtate of preparation, divine juſtice does not require, that every good or bad man ſhould, according to his works, be reſpectively recompenſed here: yet the wiſdom, and goodneſs, and juſtice of God do require, that in general virtue ſhould be rewarded, and ſin puniſhed; and that in ſuch degrees, and in ſuch a manner, as ſhall lay all reaſonable reſtraints on the luſts and paſſions of men, and proportionably promote and encourage the exertion of their virtues. How far the face of things about us tends to confirm this opinion, let us next inquire; contenting ourſelves, where demonſtration cannot be had, with the higheſt degree of probability.

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It is impoſſible to parcel out by weight or admeaſurement the quantity of good and evil, that falls out in this life to reſpective individuals; ſo as demonſtratively to aſcertain the fact, that even in this world there is a conſiderable preponderation of happineſs in favour of virtue: but as the truth of this opinion forms a very powerful argument, in proof of a wiſe and good preſiding power; I ſubmit the following reflections in ſupport of it. When we obſerve mankind in general, the wicked as well as the religious, *him that feareth God, and him that feareth Him not*, ſo anxious as they appear to be, that their children ſhould purſue virtuous courſes; we muſt conclude ſuch a general deſire to have as general a motive: which is their happineſs and proſperity in life. And though this motive, which to the temporaliſt is a leading one, be to the good and virtuous only ſecondary: its effect is in both inſtances the ſame; forming an argument from univerſal conſent, that accord-

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SERMON III.

ing to the preſent diſpenſations of providence, or, if this mode of expreſſion appear an aſſumption of the point in doubt, according to the preſent courſe of things, ſucceſs even in this world is the conſequence of a virtuous conduct.

In proof of this truth, permit me to refer the argument, in another ſhape, to the diſcrimination of every man's own judgment. Let us revolve in our minds a certain number of our friends and acquaintances, whom we know to be men of virtue; and an equal number, whom we know, or have great reaſon to believe, to be vicious characters: then let us reflect, whether the virtuous or vicious characters appear to enjoy the moſt happineſs in themſelves and their connections; and from ſuch reflection concurrent opinion, I am perſuaded, will confirm the truth of the aſſertion "that "happineſs, in the ordinary and gene-"ral courſe of things, is even in this "life the handmaid and attendant on "virtue."

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"virtue." And such general dispensation of things, in favour of virtue, is a demonstration of a super-intending providence, equally and infinitely wise and good. SERMON III.

There was a sect of ancient philosophers, who carried this opinion so far; that, to obviate the argument against a wise and good presiding power, deduced from the permission and sufferance of evil, as happening indiscriminately to all men, they denied the reality of it. This caused them to adopt some extraordinary tenets, which led to wild and whimsical inferences. But both the tenets and inferences were less pernicious, and much nearer to truth, than those opposite doctrines; that, to exculpate providence from the apparent irregularities and inequalities in moral dispensations, excluded Him from having any concern in the government of the world: referring it to the management of an imaginary principle, which they

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SERMON III.

ſtiled chance, and thought better calculated to preſide in ſuch a mixt and inexplicable ſtate of things. For though it muſt be acknowledged, that there are evils in life, and that they occaſionally happen to the virtuous, as well as the wicked: yet would it on nice examination be found, that thoſe evils are leſs in degree, and in number fewer, than is generally ſuppoſed; and more frequently the conſequences of human imprudence, than the querulous diſpoſition of human nature will readily admit.

Scarcely indeed is there a more common ſubject of declamation and complaint, than the inequality obſervable in the temporal diſpenſations of providence. But giving ſomething to ſelf-love, which in our own eyes is apt to magnify our deſervings above their real value; ſomething to diſappointment, which often ſits heavier on our minds, than reaſon will juſtify; and ſomething to that depravity of heart, which inclines us to make

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make a falſe eſtimate of our own happi- SERMON
neſs, from compariſon with the apparent III.
happineſs and proſperity of others; we muſt acknowledge, there is a preponderation of happineſs in this world, ſufficient to prove the government of a wiſe and good providence: involving at the ſame time ſuch a mixture of evil, in the various courſe of events, as clearly inſtructs us to look beyond this ſcene of things for an exact adjuſtment of rewards and puniſhments

In ſhort from a fair and candid view of things about us, however diſcontent may magnify preſent diſſatisfactions, intricacies into irregularities, trials into hardſhips, impunity into proſperity; it appears inconceivable, without admitting a ſecret reſtraint on actions or their effects by the immediate interpoſition of a Divine providence, but that the good would be far greater ſufferers, than they are; and that ſociety, if not diſſolved, would be far more deranged and diſquieted,

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SERMON III.

quieted, than we experience it; conſidering the prevalence of corruption, the eagerneſs of rapine, the turbulence of ambition, the unrulineſs of paſſion, and the malignity of diſappointment.

From the conſideration of a general, let us next extend our enquiries to the doctrine of a particular, providence: in the admiſſion of which the chief difficulty ſeems to lie in a narrow mode of conceiving of God, and inadequate terms of expreſſion. We are apt to conſider the care and management of the world, agreeably to our ideas of care and management, as a laborious operation: and the mode of expreſſion, we uſe, contributes to inculcate ſuch ideas. We ſpeak of God's taking charge of the affairs of the world, of His adminiſtration of them, of His adjuſtment of cauſes and effects, and the like: terms, which we are forced to employ, for want of ſuch as would better ſuit that infinite and incomprehenſible mind; which at once glances

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glances through time and nature, and with omnipotence of will directs, governs, and controls. SERMON III.

Such opinion of the government of the univerſe, as a work of pains and labour, was I conceive an argument of additional weight to that already ſuggeſted; in inducing the Epicureans, a ſect of philoſophers conſiderable both for their learning and numbers, to imagine the government of the univerſe too troubleſome, to engage the attention of the Deity. They conſidered Him, as by nature neceſſarily and perfectly happy, and therefore above inveſting himſelf with a charge; which to conduct with uniform and conſiſtent regularity, they ſuppoſed, muſt occaſion care and conſideration, and of courſe detract from His felicity. The idea is elegantly deſcribed by the Latin poet; himſelf a zealous advocate for the doctrine, and the ſect.

* Omnis

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SERMON III.

Omnis *, enim per se divûm natura necesse † 'st
Immortali ævo summâ cum pace fruatur,
Semota ab nostris rebus, sejunctaque longe;
Nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
Ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri,
Nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangitur Ira.
LUCRETIUS, lib. I.

On this opinion, I have only to observe a narrowness of mind; which could suppose the direction and management of so small a part of the unbounded works of creation, a care and trouble to its omnipotent Creator. Far be it however from man's presumption, to affect to

* The gods by fate and nature must enjoy
Immortal life, and bliss without alloy;
Sequester'd far from earth, and earthly things,
The threats of danger, and of pain the stings:
In the perfection of their own high powers
Supremely happy, they require not ours;
Our actions all indifferently regard,
Hold up no scourge, and tender no reward.

† The word *necesse*, in this passage, seems to allude to FATE: a necessarian principle, which in the Epicurean system, controls even the gods themselves.

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point out in what manner, He directs and governs His innumerable works; of which this univerſe of ours is but a point: certainly not by toil and labour; nor by any means detracting from ſupreme felicity. He governs; as He created: and the ſublime * deſcription, given by Moſes, of His creation of the world, will perhaps beſt ſuit his government of it too; effected by the influence of an energetic volition, unimpeded by difficulties, unincumbered by diſtraction. SERMON III.

To ſuppoſe every diſtribution of good and evil, of happineſs and miſery, by certain general laws to have been irreverſibly ordained to take place in this life, when nature was firſt put in motion, is in effect to limit the operations of Him, who impoſed thoſe laws on nature;

* The paſſage alluded to is noticed by Longinus, as an uncommon inſtance of the true ſublime.

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SERMON III.

ture; and by such restrictions in a degree to exclude Him from His own works: it is taking from Him every other, than a sustaining power. Whereas, by referring such general succession of events to a concatenation of causes decreed at the formation of all things, the wisdom and goodness of God in particular instances, and as occasions present themselves, applying the established laws of nature to the benefit, comfort, and correction of individuals; we learn to reconcile the particular dispensations of providence with the general course of nature. Thus we know, certain causes will produce certain effects: yet we see in the moral world varying effects often derived from an apparent similarity of causes. Infinite wisdom sees what effects in particular circumstances, and for particular, and wise, and good reasons ought to follow; and those He directs to follow: and on this ground is founded the poet's reflection, which has been abused to false

and

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and pernicious inferences, that "what- SERMON III.
"ever is, is right." That is, whatever event takes place, it is the reſult of certain ſecret cauſes; wiſely modified and directed by the Almighty Governor of the world, ſo as to be the beſt reſult that could happen from the cauſes that produced it.

Our eyes diſcover to us nothing, and from reflection we know little, of the ſecret ſprings, by which the occurrences of this life are moved. In aſſerting the particular diſpenſations of providence; we do not preclude their aſpect to other objects and effects, than the ſimple one we particularly note. On the contrary, we may with good reaſon conclude, that all the diſpenſations of providence are ſo conducted, as to have a further influence; than in any particular inſtance, and on the ſingle individual, to which they may appear to us to be principally directed. We may ſuppoſe each, like a link in the vaſt chain of nature's moral courſe, to

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SERMON III.

to have reſpect to the great whole. For who can ſay, that the Author of nature cannot ſo manage both the natural, and moral courſe of things; as to make the bleſſings and corrections, He ſhall will to individuals, harmoniſe with His general laws. And if no good reaſon can be produced in proof that He cannot do it, that is, if ſuch act imply no contradiction; we may juſtly conclude He does it: becauſe ſuch operation enlarges our ideas of His power, wiſdom, and goodneſs; of which the utmoſt reach of imagination will not enable us to think ſufficiently high. Every day's experience informs us of eſcapes from dangers, deliverances from diſtreſs, the detection of ſecret ſins ſo unexpected, ſo unaſſignable to any known cauſe, that we attribute them to the immediate interpoſition and interference of God: who muſt ſee and obſerve them, becauſe He is always every where; and whoſe energetic power, unſuſtained by which the courſe of nature would fail, what He ſees

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ſees and obſerves, muſt direct and govern too. SERMON III.

When men ſpeak of the general laws of nature; they can only underſtand thoſe general cauſes and effects, with which they are acquainted. Thoſe, we are not to ſuppoſe, God will upon every light occaſion ſuſpend, or alter. But are there not, may there not be, hidden cauſes, which we cannot ſee; by which providence acts in his particular diſpenſations? Such in the moral world there muſt be. For the progreſs and direction of the paſſions are in different men combined with ſuch a variety of adventitious circumſtances; as ſeem to require from providence different degrees of encouragement, aſſiſtance, and correction: ſuch different degrees, as cannot depend upon any general ſyſtem, or courſe of things predetermined by God; and therefore infer the neceſſity of particular diſpenſations. And the moral courſe of things, ſo diſpoſed and attempered, pro-

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SERMON III.

duces that general harmony, which is experienced, and eaſily reconciled, by the admiſſion of an interfering and interpoſing providence; every where and always preſent as He is, noting all things as He does, and univerſally energetic as our beſt conceptions of His nature repreſent Him.

In ſhort to diſcard the belief of a particular providence, is the next ſtep to throwing aſide the belief of any providence whatever: for it muſt be almoſt immaterial to individuals, whether there be any providence, or not; if every thing be governed by predetermined laws. On ſuch a ſuppoſition, where is the aſſiſtance, to which patient merit may apply? If one uniform tenor, without reſpect to particular perſons, and particular caſes, prevail in the operations of nature; diſtreſs has no where to look for comfort, the workings of the pious heart in prayer are inefficacious and vain.

Hence

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SERMON III.

Hence then it appears, that the denial of ſuch a power to providence, in itſelf the height of preſumption, leads to the loweſt depths of deſperation. For how muſt it mortify a thinking mind, for a moment to imagine; that the Almighty, after having created the univerſe, and ordained laws for its general government, ſatisfied with having furniſhed it with inhabitants, and provided for their common ſupport, ſent them to ſucceed each other on this great ſtage; expoſed to innumerable evils, which it is not in their power to ſhun; and deprived of the protection of that Being, who alone is able to ſhield us from them, or, what is more deſireable, to convert them to our advantage. At that moment we ceaſe to be encouraged with the lively hopes, that in our endeavours, if we deſerve the Divine aſſiſtance, we ſhall enjoy it; in our dangers, if we merit deliverance, it will be providentially vouchſafed us; in diſtreſs, if virtue arm us, God will make the angry ſhaft of adverſity, "Telum

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SERMON III.

" imbelle ſine ictu," fall harmleſs at our feet.

What hath been offered, eſtabliſhing, as I have endeavoured to do, the doctrine of a Providence, particular as well as general, inculcates by practical conſequence the Chriſtian fortitude of truſt. If the world be of God's creation, what He created with power, He muſt govern with exactneſs: and therefore we may reſt aſſured, there muſt be a meaning in the permiſſion, a propriety in the tendency of every event. On this perſuaſion let us repoſe with ſubmiſſive and patient truſt, that whatever incidents of affliction or ſurpriſe occur; they are founded in deſign, and their end is expedient. An unerring ſuper-intendant ordains, an all-pervading eye obſerves, and omni-preſent power directs them. To that adorable power let us look up; aſſured, that though in this mixt ſtate of things evil be unavoidable, that evil, God can and does attemper with appendages

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dages of good, ſupplied by ſecret means; thoſe means conducted, with infinite wiſdom and deſign, with every poſſible attention to the deſerving.

SERMON III.

SERMON IV

Pſalm xcv. 6.

O come let us worſhip and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker: for He is our God, and we are the people of his paſture.

SERMON IV.

IN evidence, that the world was originally made by a Being infinite in wiſdom and power; and that a power, no leſs perfect than that which made the world, directs, governs and upholds it in that harmony and regularity, which is ſo conſpicuous through the whole range of created beings; the arguments adduced have, I truſt, been found to approach very near to demonſtration: as a truth deducible from theſe doctrines, my

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my next ſubject of enquiry is the obligation of religious worſhip. SERMON IV.

And in this inveſtigation my deſign is firſt to conſider at large the general propoſition.

Secondly, to examine the principle, that lifts up the pious heart to Heaven in prayer.

And in the third and laſt place to evince the cloſe connection, that God Almighty hath ordained between religion and the ſocial duties: ſo cloſe, that without the former, civil ſociety could not ſubſiſt.

I. Firſt, then as to the general obligation of religion. A capacity to diſcover that there is a God, who made and preſerves us: and that we are not able to do the one or the other of ourſelves, indiſpenſably requires us to love, honour, and ſerve that Maker and Preſerver in every inſtance

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SERMON IV.

and action of our lives. For as long as we regard existence as a blessing; so long do we acknowledge ourselves indebted to the giver and preserver of life. Now as we are able to infer an obligation for a benefit received; such sufficiency of knowledge in us, in regard to the benefits, we have from our great Creator received, is of itself a true and proper foundation for religious worship: and every creature capable of making such an inference, as every reasonable creature is, becomes therefore subjected to the duty of gratitude; and from a conscious sense of gratitude to God flow the duties of religion. Thus conclusive is natural reason, in proving the necessity of religious worship among all beings, who possess a degree of intelligence equal to that of man.

And experience confirms that in fact, the propriety of which reason evidences to us in theory. For among all nations, be their notions more or less refined, religious

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ligious worship prevails. The most barbarous and uncivilised nations, as well antient as modern, if their state be thoroughly enquired into, we shall find had a religion, though sometimes a very depraved one; and offered up prayers, and made adorations, though the object of them has been a serpent, or a calf. Even the wretched barbarians, in the South Seas, whom the late discoveries of modern travellers have made known to us, though some of them almost without clothes, or houses, were none of them observed to be without their God. SERMON IV.

From a practice so universal it appears, that God has stamped an image of Himself on the human mind so deeply, that the greatest corruption of mankind has not been able entirely to erase it; that He has naturally inculcated the method of acknowledging Him the supreme cause of all things by prayer and adoration, so strongly, as the lowest depravation

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SERMON IV.

tion of manners cannot abſolutely aboliſh. And hence we may infer, that religion is a reaſonable ſervice, and a duty abſolutely required of us: or why did God, who made us, and never acts in vain, imprint ſuch a notion on the human mind; if it be a matter of no conſequence, and calculated for no uſe. But is it a matter of no conſequence, to offer up our tribute of praiſe to that great fountain of goodneſs, from whom all our bleſſings flow? Is it a matter of no conſequence, to aſcribe to Him the honour due unto His name: to pay juſt homage to Almighty God, the Lord of Lords, and King of Kings? Or, is it not rather natural to conceive, that the infinitely great Creator of all things, when in ſuch manifeſtation of His adorable perfections He deſigned the general happineſs, alſo involved in it a diſplay of his own glory: willing that they ſhould be acknowledged and reverenced, loved and praiſed by intelligent creatures? And ſuch acknowledgment accordingly becomes

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becomes a natural duty, and has the firſt moral claim to univerſal obſervance. For as honour in general is the homage paid to conſpicuous excellencies, and eſpecially to beneficent virtues: ſo religion, which is the higheſt honour, is appropriately due to God; the moſt abſolute Being in all perfections, and our ſovereign Benefactor.

Our homage can not indeed add to the greatneſs of the Almighty: it can contribute nothing to His glory. He alſo knows our neceſſities without our information; He knows what we have need of, before we aſk; and how to impart to us good things, better than we to aſk them: ſo great are our ideas of the majeſty of an all-wiſe Almighty God. Yet to refuſe that homage, would be a ſinful omiſſion in us: as it is a conſtant acknowledgment of the exiſtence of a God, a continual memorial to us of our own littleneſs and dependence, and of His tranſcendent greatneſs and ſuperintending

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SERMON IV.

ſuperintending providence. We offer praiſes and thankſgiving to God for His mercies daily and hourly reached out to us; not that He can receive any additional honour from the praiſes, that duſt and aſhes can beſtow; but to make ſuch diſplay of His honour and glory, as rational creatures are enabled to proclaim; to teſtify a grateful ſenſe of His mercies reached out to us, and our own inability to render more: as a proof that we feel thoſe mercies, and exerciſe the faculties, He hath conferred on us, in a becoming manner, and according to their proper uſe. We implore His protection in dangers, His deliverance out of afflictions, and His ſupport againſt the force of temptations, not that we ſuppoſe Him ignorant of our weakneſſes or our wants: but in pious atteſtation of our entire dependence on Him for every evil we avoid, and for every good we in this life enjoy; as a pledge of our belief in His omnipotence, of our reliance on His mercies, our reſignation to the diſpenſations of

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of His providence: and in teſtimony of a full aſſurance of His provident concern for His whole creation. SERMON IV.

Thus general is the ſenſe of religion: and ſo univerſal the obſervance of it. And thus clearly doth it preſs on us, as an indiſpenſable duty. The object of religious worſhip, it is acknowledged, is not always the ſame; nor even the principle of it: ſome worſhip the ſun, and ſome a crocodile; ſome a good being, and ſome a bad one; ſome through love, and ſome through fear. Yet ſuch variety proves nothing againſt the general truth of religion, and the conſequent obligation to obſerve it. On the contrary, like counterfeit coins, it tends to prove one of real value; of value to be counterfeited. And if there be one religion, which ſhines with more extraordinary characters of truth, than the reſt; it forms a ſubject, of every thing on this ſide the grave moſt worthy of ſerious inveſtigation:

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SERMON IV.

veſtigation: for without religion we are not men.

Reaſon indeed is generally ſuppoſed to be the diſtinguiſhing mark or characteriſtic of human nature: but perhaps religion is a much better. Reaſon, brutes have in common with mankind, and ſome brutes a conſiderable degree of it; or at leaſt they poſſeſs ſomething ſo much like reaſon, that it is difficult to draw the line of diſtinction between them. But no traits of religion do we diſcover in any of them. Religion, the knowledge and ſervice of God, is the prerogative of man: it is the moſt reaſonable and honourable employment, of which human nature is capable: it leads to an intercourſe with God himſelf; which, while mankind acknowledge a God ſupreme, if they would acknowledge Him to any good purpoſe, the voice of reaſon and the impulſe of nature, excite them to cultivate by acts of adoration and prayer.

II. This

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II. This ſubject of prayer hath exerciſed the pens both of poets and philoſophers in the the heathen world. And amongſt the inſpired writers the prince and poet of Iſrael is moſt frequent in his exhortations to it: and his expreſſions always mark the fervour of an intereſted heart. "O Thou, that heareſt prayer, 'ſays he'; to thee ſhall all fleſh come." It is indeed a duty ſo univerſal; that all mankind with an unforced aſſent agree in the obſervance of it. Let us then, as was propoſed in the ſecond place, with ſome minuteneſs enter into the principle of a duty, that in every age and country hath obtained ſo univerſal obſervance.

In the common intercourſe of life between man and man, between ſuperiours and inferiours, it will often happen that favours are conferred; which thoſe, on whom they are conferred, have not ability to repay. Yet ſome return the common principles of juſtice require, and prompt the perſon who receives them

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SERMON IV.

them to make. What return then ſhall extreme impotence render; and the benefactor's knowledge of that impotence demand? What, but the tribute of a grateful mind. The ſame reaſoning will apply to the Deity; only in an infinitely higher degree: as infinitely higher, as the bleſſings of creation and preſervation are above thoſe accidental enjoyments, that depend on them. And ſuch affection of the mind, as mankind feels for thoſe ineſtimable bleſſings, naturally produces that glow of gratitude; which the enraptured heart pours out in the effuſions of pious praiſe. Hence is deducible the duty of prayer: which reſting on the doctrine of a particular providence, that doctrine in my laſt diſcourſe I particularly applied myſelf to eſtabliſh: intending, under the preſent article of enquiry, a more particular diſcuſſion of the duty reſulting from it.

Man feels a thouſand wants, which he cannot of himſelf ſupply; he foreſees dangers,

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dangers, which he knows not how to shun; he finds himself involved in difficulties, from which he perceives all human art and power incompetent to relieve him. In this emergency, nature, that in indelible characters hath graven the existence of God on the human heart, teaches him likewise the use of that innate knowledge, by secret admonitions to invoke his Creator's aid. If the former notion be natural to the human mind, and what is universal must be so; the latter, which is only the application of the former, must be so too. Those prayers, suggested by the impulse of nature in short ejaculations, the exercise of reason afterward matured into form, with length and expressive solemnity: and, from the use of private votaries, they became extended to public assemblies. And such public celebration of divine worship, more or less simple, as the respective people are more or less civilised, or rude, hath extended as far as the empire of reason prevails.

SERMON IV.

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SERMON IV.

Now this duty of prayer, ſo natural to the human mind, and by communities ſo univerſally practiſed, is ſupported on the reality of a particular providence. For if at the time, the world was made, the laws of nature were given; general, invariable laws, which nature was bound to purſue; the Deity enthroned in majeſty ſublime, aloof as it were from his own works, or at moſt an unactive ſpectator of them, never interpoſing his power through ſecond cauſes, to divert evil, to inflict correction, to ſave and to deſtroy; on what ground ſhould we addreſs the throne of heaven, for protection in time of danger, for ſupport amidſt temptations, or in times of diſtreſs for deliverance out of trouble: ſubjects, which, while we live in the world, muſt form a part of our daily prayers? The world under ſuch circumſtances of general government, where would be the uſe of prayer? And without the uſe, how ſhall we account for the apparent univerſality of it? On ſuppoſition that every

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every distribution of good and evil, of happiness and misery, is irreversibly ordained to take place in this life, according to certain general laws imposed on nature, which in no instance whatever admit of any alteration in our favour: what futility, what weakness, I had almost said what folly were it, to throw up any particular petition to the Almighty for any occasional blessing, we may stand most in need of; which, to our prayers, though ever so ardent and importunate, on the supposed exclusion of a particular providence, we know will not, cannot be granted. SERMON IV.

Such uncomfortable consequences as these, the admission of a providence acting every where, and, if it act any where, it must act every where, pervading every minutest particle in nature, ever noting and directing every movement of the moral world, effectually precludes. This important, exhilerating truth communicates encouragement to virtuous pursuits,

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SERMON IV. adds vigour to good endeavours, beams comfort to distress; and awes the front of profligacy with a control superior to the menace of racks and tortures, or the check of worldly shame.

And apart from the immediate blessings, prayer draws down on the relying votary, the practice of it is calculated to improve the mind in virtue; exalting human nature by communications with the Divine. It habituates us to look up to God, as the author of all good, infuses the love of Him in our hearts, and imprints the consciousness of his perpetual presence on our minds: which is the most efficacious preservative against the admittance of impure thoughts, and the perpetration of flagitious actions. Thus to contemplate the Deity, and hold communion with him in the manner reason directs, is using our intellectual faculties, as to the highest reach, so to the truest purpose of them. It would be difficult to assign any other good, pointedly

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tedly and eſſentially good, uſe of them; and it is impoſſible to aſſign a better. SERMON IV.

III. To ſupport the arguments already offered in proof of the obligation of religion on all beings poſſeſt of intellectual powers equal to thoſe of man; I proceed in the third and laſt place to obſerve the connection, that God Almighty hath ordained between the acknowledgment of Him, expreſſed in the duties of religion; and the good order of ſociety, and comforts of life from thence reſulting, the practice of the ſocial and relative duties.

Of this truth the proof muſt reſt chiefly on hiſtorical repreſentation: and to this we may appeal in evidence, that where there has been found little ſenſe of God and religion, or where the notions of religion have been greatly debaſed and corrupted; there the manners of the people have been moſt ſavage and brutiſh. On the contrary, where the juſteſt and moſt lively ſenſe of a Deity

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SERMON IV.

and providence prevailed; there the ſocial and relative virtues have moſt flouriſhed, the moſt worthy and generous actions have been performed, and the manners have been ever the moſt humane and civiliſed. This is ſo clear and acknowledged a truth, and ſo forcibly ſtruck a great Heathen, that "if "piety towards God were removed, he "declares it his opinion, that there "would be an end of all fidelity, of the "bonds of all human ſociety, and even "of juſtice itſelf, the ſum and compre-"henſion of all moral virtues."* The reflection is worthy of a Chriſtian philoſopher: and, the queſtion properly ſtated, the ſoundeſt divinity would with the great Roman decide on it.

The queſtion is not, whether a particular thoughtful ſpeculatiſt may not ſee

* Atque haud ſcio an, pietate adverſus Deos ſublata, fides etiam, et ſocietas humani generis, et una excellentiſſima virtus juſtitia, tollatur.

Cic. de Nat. Deor. Lib. 1.

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the fitneſs of many moral actions, and perform them accordingly; without regard to any other conſideration, without reflecting on a preſiding, governing, remunerating, chaſtiſing power: though even on this reſtricted ſtatement of the caſe, an impartial obſerver of human nature would not heſitate to declare in the negative. But the ſubject of enquiry is; whether, uninfluenced by the apprehenſion, of ſomething diſtinct from this principle of mere fitneſs or congruity of actions to the nature of things, of ſome being, on whom the exiſtence of things themſelves, and conſequently their natures, and the congruity of one to another, depend, the generality of men could ever poſſeſs ſuch firm notions of good and evil, as would conſtitute a ſufficient principle of reſtraint from the one, and impulſe to the other. And this queſtion is no ſooner aſked, than the anſwer follows: that moſt aſſuredly the love and dread of that SOMETHING, by whoſe power the things themſelves exiſt, and

SERMON IV.

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SERMON IV.

by whoſe will the congruity of them to one another was fixed, is that principle; which acting uniformly, and univerſally, forcibly and clearly too, influences the bulk of mankind by the powerful motives of hope and fear.

And the knowledge we have of the human mind, derived from leſſons of experience, inſtructs us; that without ſuch belief of a ſupreme intelligent Being, on whom the nature of things depends, who has a power of exacting from all free agents a conformity of conduct to that law of nature, which He has eſtabliſhed, and will ſome way or other take cognizance of them; or, in a ſhorter form of words, without religion, ſuch a law, as is ſuppoſed to ariſe merely from the fitneſs of things, would have but very little influence. It would be as inſufficient and unimpreſſive to the greateſt part of mankind; as a human law, without a ſanction annexed to it, or

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or the apprehenſion of a magiſtrate to put it in execution. SERMON IV.

It is poſſible that ſome men may poſſeſs ſuch ſocial benevolence, and ſuch generous ſentiments of public good, as to be a law to themſelves; and at the ſame time be endowed with ſuch diſtinguiſhing judgment and acuteneſs of mind, as may enable them clearly to ſee, and voluntarily to act, as the beſt human laws would direct them. But what is this to the bulk of mankind? We are in the preſent argument to take human nature as it generally is, and to conſider what ſort of belief or perſuaſion has the moſt prevalent and univerſal influence over it: and if we do ſo, we ſhall find that the rejection of religion, and its leading principles, is inconſiſtent with a perfect morality on two accounts.

First, if there be no belief of a God, and His preſiding power, nor any expectation from that inviſible Being of future

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SERMON IV.

future rewards and punishments, there cannot be in the conception of common sense, any sufficient bond of morality between man and man. And secondly, if there be really a God, that has any concern with us, or for us; a compleat morality must necessarily respect Him, as well as our intercourse with one another.

First, if indeed the actions of men were directed by instinct, and by instinct only, like the actions of brutes; and had no dependence on any invisible principle in the mind; morality would in that case be nothing else than living according to that natural instinct: nor would any kind of faith or belief be necessary. But this is not the morality of beings endued with understanding, and freedom of will; nor is it what gives them such consciousness of the merit or demerit of their own actions, as is capable of raising pleasure or dissatisfacton within themselves, on account of them. It is a circum-

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a circumſtance or conſideration of a much higher nature, that acts thus: requiring reaſon and reflection, and ſome attention to things paſt and future, as well as the preſent; and ſuppoſing conſequently a belief of ſomething inviſible, by which we are moved to a rational courſe of acting. And ſuch conſideration further implies a compariſon of actions with ſome antecedent rule or law, for the obſervance or tranſgreſſion of which we inwardly judge ourſelves rewardable by, or accountable to, that ſuperiour Being; who is, by ſome means we cannot comprehend, as conſcious of what we do, as we are ourſelves. It is this principle; which, as in one point of view we have found it move on ſtronger hinges, than moral fitneſs and the congruity of things, is in another that, which diſtinguiſhes reaſon from mere inſtinct, ranks mankind above the brute creation, and renders them accountable beings. SERMON IV.

Conſider

SERMON IV.

Conſider ſecondly, the force of ſelf-love: and that alone will be found of tendency ſufficient to ſubvert the rectitude of moral actions; did they not depend on the acknowledgment of principles remote from ſenſation, and more powerful than mutual convenience. It is the ſecret ſenſe we feel of an obligation to the ſteady performance of certain actions, founded on the belief of an intelligent legiſlator, who is alſo an inſpector of our behaviour; which gives efficacious impulſe to them. For define virtue in what manner we pleaſe; let it be the love of order, harmony, or proportion of mind; let it be a habit or temper of living agreeably to the perfection of nature, or of acting for the good of the whole human race, of which we are but a part; call it as we may, by whatever ſpecious name: yet the queſtion ſtill recurs; who conſtituted this order of things: who firſt effected this harmony or proportion: or, who is the author of this courſe of things, which we

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we call the courſe of nature? for He muſt be the ultimate legiſlator: and this law of nature, this rule of morality, which we are taught to obſerve, muſt be His will; directed by His ſupreme authority; and muſt therefore in the firſt inſtance reſpect Him. SERMON IV.

Under ſuch perſuaſion, it is his influential power, that actuates us in our determinations, and the execution of them: and not the order, fitneſs, and propriety of the things themſelves. Without the powerful co-operation of this principle, how weak would be the influence of moral conſiderations! If, by an act of private injury, we could indulge a preſent gratification; eaſily would the plea of ſelf-indulgence break through the cobweb texture of exact propriety: and weak would be the voice of mutual convenience; whenever ſelf-intereſt interfered. It is conſcience alone, that can combat temptations; and triumph over the ſtrong principle of ſelf-love, in whatever ſhape it may aſſault us. And conſcience is ſolely founded

SERMON IV.

founded on a conſciouſneſs of a ſupreme intelligent Being, the framer of thoſe laws of morality; and of our accountableneſs to Him for the breach of them. And naturally and cloſely united with our belief of ſuch a divine exiſtence is the opinion or perſuaſion, that this ſupreme Being is a witneſs of what we do even in our moſt ſecret receſſes; and conſiders our actions with favour or diſpleaſure: for without this conſideration, it would be difficult to conceive, how our own conſciences ſhould be affected with ſhame or ſatisfaction, not dependent on the eſtimation of the world, but entirely our own: a ſhame, though men applaud us, when we do ill; and a ſatisfaction, though men cenſure us for worthy actions.

Theſe effects of conſcience imply a belief of the intimate and conſtant preſence of one, whoſe favour or diſpleaſure is more to be regarded, than any outward conſideration. And it hence follows,

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lows, that whatever opinion ſets us looſe from the reſtraint of conſcience, will render our juſtice, fidelity, gratitude, and all other virtues reſpecting our fellow creatures very precarious: and that therefore an avowed diſregard of religion, and its influence, muſt be neceſſarily deſtructive of that morality, which regards our intercourſe with one another; and ſubverſive of civil ſociety. SERMON IV.

Such is the natural relation of religion to morality; of ſuch importance to this is that, in force and uſe. What therefore God hath connected and joined together, not all the caſuiſtry and device of man can put aſunder. Morality cannot be compleat and perfect, without a diſcharge of what is due to, without a regulation of behaviour, ſuiting and becoming, every relation, in which we ſtand to every being; the duty we owe, riſing in exigence proportionate to the excellence of the being, to whom we owe it. The firſt, the moſt diſtinguiſhed, part of relative

SERMON IV.

relative duty therefore muſt be in proper acts of devout homage to that firſt and ſupreme Being; from whom we derive all that we poſſeſs, even the principle, that teaches us this duty, the power of reaſon itſelf: and thoſe acts of homage conſtitute religion.

With ſuch irreſtible light doth reaſon illuſtrate the general obligation of religious duties. *Though heaven and earth paſs away*; religion, whatever the weak and the vain may affect to think of it, is a ſervice, that will continue for ever. It is the employment of ſuperior beings; and will continue, when this periſhable globe of ours ſhall be no more. There may be thoſe, their time devoted to pleaſure, or engaged by buſineſs, who affect ſurpriſe; that any ſhould be found ſo weak, as to trouble themſelves about its doctrines, or take a ſerious part in its pretenſions. But if there be a God; religion is a ſerious thing. And if its pretenſions be examined with becoming

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ſeriouſneſs, and its merits without preju- SERMON IV.
dice decided on; we ſhall find, that to believe its doctrines, and to practice its precepts aright, is the wiſeſt thing, that can engage a wiſe man's attention; and the nobleſt principle, that can influence his conduct. Gratitude enjoins the obſervance of it as a duty; and the object renders it the firſt and great duty. Hope warmly intereſts good men in its favour: and juſt apprehenſion ſhould teach all men with reverence to regard it. The wit and ingenuity of man may have been employed againſt this, and that, and every mode of religion; which tends to reſtrain the appetites and inclinations of mankind. But we may defy the wit, and ingenuity, and malice of human nature, to produce a ſingle argument; in diſproof of the obligation of religion on all beings, poſſeſt of a degree of intelligence equal to that of man.

Knaves may deteſt, and fools deride, the wiſe man will always revere, it. Cre-

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SERMON IV.

ating satisfaction, it sanctions the enjoyments of life: inspiring fortitude, it renders the evils of life supportable; and opens the amplest prospect of fair and reasonable hopes. Let us hold it fast: to the fastidious sneer, and the calumnious cavil, let no false respect for politeness, or even greatness itself, deter us from *giving an answer*. And that we may at all times, and on all occasions, be ready with our best exertions to defend its sacred truths, and to evince them in our lives; May God of His infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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SERMON V.

Iſaiah lix. 9.

We wait for light; but behold obſcurity: for brightneſs, but we walk in darkneſs.

SERMON V.

THE prophet, in the beginning of this chapter, exclaims againſt the vices of his people; and laments their deplorable depravation of manners, immerſed as they were in the darkneſs of ignorance and ſin. Thence ſtretching forward his anxious eye to the expected coming of the Meſſiah, deſtined to remove the cloud that veiled their underſtanding, we *wait*, ſays he, *for light, but ſtill behold obſcurity*; expectant of brightneſs, we continue to walk in the devious

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SERMON V.

path of error and ſin. At length, his mind as it were exulting in a full proſpect of that day, when *the ſun of righteouſneſs ſhall ariſe, and the redeemer appear in Zion*; in the ſpirit of prophecy he pronounces, that the extended world from eaſt to weſt ſhall acknowledge his ſway. *So ſhall they fear*, ſays he, *the name of the Lord from the weſt, and his glory from the riſing of the ſun: when the enemy ſhall come up like a flood; the ſpirit of the Lord ſhall ſet up a ſtandard againſt him. And the redeemer ſhall come to Sion; and unto them that turn from tranſgreſſion in Jacob.*

Something, ſimilar to this reflection of the prophet, ſtrikes us in the ſecond Alcibiades of Plato: in which Socrates informs his diſciple, that they were to wait for a teacher, who would inſtruct them more perfectly in the duties of religion. This remarkable paſſage has by an elegant writer * of our own nation

* Mr. Addiſon.

been

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been made the ſubject of criticiſm: and other commentators have concurred with him, in ſuppoſing it to bear ſome alluſion to that *life and immortality*, which Jeſus Chriſt afterwards *brought to light through his goſpel*. Be that as it may; conſidering the obſcurity and perplexity, with which the philoſopher expreſſes himſelf on the ſubject of prayer, I think it clearly inferrible from thence, that he conceived the light of nature, or the bare apprehenſion of reaſon, inſufficient to direct mankind fully and ſatisfactorily in that great important duty: ſo great and important in that wiſe heathen's opinion, as to require more information than the world at that time poſſeſſed.

SERMON V.

In accommodation to minds of a certain complection, on which the authority of an eminent heathen, I know not by what kind of perverſeneſs, has more weight than that of writers, whom we juſtly ſtile DIVINE; of the paſſage, to which I have above alluded, I will

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SERMON V. take occaſion to enter into a more minute diſcuſſion. Αναγκαιον ουν εςι περιμενειν, εως αν τις μαθη ως δει προς Θεους και προς ανθρωπους διακεισθαι. * Socrates muſt from hence either mean to inſinuate; that we were to wait for the future appearance of a perſon, to inſtruct mankind in the duty of religion, of more general knowledge, higher natural abilities, and greater reach of underſtanding, than himſelf, or any one, who had appeared before him, poſſeſſed: or, that we muſt wait for ſome perſon, who ſhould for that purpoſe be by God particularly delegated.

In reſpect to his own natural abilities, and reach of underſtanding; it is pretty clear, our philoſopher did not think very meanly of himſelf. Many of his cotemporaries objected to him the charge of vanity: and one in particular termed him, "of the few good men, the beſt;

* Wherefore we muſt be forced to wait till ſome one ſhall inſtruct us, how we ought to conduct ourſelves towards the Gods and men.

"and

"and of many vain ones, the vain- SERMON
"est." * Notwithstanding the affected V.
humility of that celebrated acknowledgment, "that all he knew, was, that he "knew nothing:" confident as he ever appeared in the rectitude of his own opinions, and obstinate in maintaining them, he certainly entertained no contemptible notion of his own superiour wisdom. And the ignorance he confessed, seems only to have been a trap to gain applause: or at most it was no other than an ignorance of particular subjects, of that physical knowledge, of which the philosophers used to boast themselves; such as the nature of the Gods, the principles of things, &c. And accordingly the consequence, that the sophists, or philosophers, assumed from their affected science in those studies, he derisorily contrasted by an avowed ignorance of them: quitted those vain, unsatisfac-

* Σωκρατες ανδρων βελτιστ' ολιγων, πολλων δε ματαιοταθ'—

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SERMON V. tory ſubjects of inveſtigation, and confined his philoſophical diſquiſitions to ethics.

Competent, as he was to judge of the powers of the human mind, and reaſoning from analogy, he could have little ground to expect, or even hope; that the bare ſtrength of unaſſiſted reaſon would in any individual ever reach that perfection of knowledge, which ſhould be able to inveſtigate the nature of God, and to aſcertain the duties of man from ſuch inveſtigation reſulting. He ſaw, what human reaſon from ſuch reſearches had effected; and from thence judged, what it could do. We muſt therefore conclude, that he did not expect a man of that very ſuperiour reach of underſtanding; which ſhould be able, from the natural powers of human reaſon, to ſet mankind aright in their knowledge of God, and the immediate duties that relate to Him.

What then did he expect, what did he teach his diſciple to look for? Plainly

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ly for a perſon endowed with powers of mind, enlarged beyond the ordinary ſtretch of human capacity; and delegated to the office of inſtructing mankind in their immediate duty to God. And as ſuch qualification of courſe involved a more perfect knowledge of the Deity, than philoſophy had ever taught; ſo likewiſe did it imply a more perfect practice of the duties immediately flowing from our relation to Him, than mankind had before been accuſtomed to obſerve. And ſuch deſignation, and ſuch knowledge, charactered a perſon charged with a divine revelation. SERMON V.

I do not call to my aſſiſtance in this argument the foreknowledge of events, to which this philoſopher occaſionally made pretenſions; and ſuppoſe his obſervation, on the reaſonable expectation of a future inſtructor, a prophecy. I preſs it no further than in proof, that the wiſe heathen was convinced of the neceſſity of a revelation: and we may be

SERMON V.

be bold to ſet the opinion of the man, whom antiquity proclaimed the wiſeſt of mankind, againſt all that the philoſophic pride of this, or any other age, hath ſaid or written againſt it. And ſuch the opinion of Socrates, is very reconcileable with the general notions of prophecies, miracles, and myſteries; to which all nations have occaſionally pretended, and attributed them to the operation of their Gods: and therefore is liable to no objection, on account of the ſuppoſed ſingularity of it.

From this eminent character of antiquity, let us deſcend to one of more modern date: from whom I have to offer an argument, though of a different nature, in point and purpoſe the ſame; I mean the learned and able author of the "Religion of Nature delineated." It is an argument, his own labours ſupply; and his own acknowledgment ſupports it. "Here, 'ſays that able writer, ſpeaking of the immortality of the ſoul,' I be-

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gin to be very ſenſible, how much I want a guide. But as the religion of nature is my theme, I muſt at preſent content myſelf with that light, which nature affords." * And indeed the neceſſity of ſuch a guide, as he alludes to, his laborious inveſtigation of the ſubject, on which he writes, abundantly evinces. For if a knowledge of the divine nature, and man's duty to God from thence reſulting, were neceſſary to human happineſs; and ſuch a courſe of argument, as he purſues, were the only means natural reaſon pointed out for attaining to it: ſo few are capable of being inſtructed by ſo abſtruſe a method, as renders evident the further want of ſome more compendious, clear, and ready means of communicating it; and demonſtrates, that a revelation was neceſſary for the general inſtruction of mankind.

SERMON V.

* Wollaſton's Relig. of Nat. ſect. 9.

On

SERMON V.

On the nature of the Deity, the preſent ſtate of man, and the duties incumbent on him, as deduced from the principles of cultivated reaſon, perhaps no writer ever thought ſo well, or ſo ſatisfactorily addreſſed himſelf to the underſtanding, as Wollaſton. But why hath he, or many other moderns that might be cited, thought and written of the religion of nature ſo much better, than the antients have done: except that they had a light, which thoſe wanted; the light, that chriſtianity hath holden out to them: with which many have emblazed their idol, reaſon; overlooking, like the votaries of the moon, the great ſource from whence all its light is derived? Look into the writings of the antients, and ſee how far their abilities in every branch of literature, that doth not depend on experiments, mock the feeble efforts of later ages to excel, or rival them; and then let thoſe, who can, produce a reaſon, why the moderns have written ſo much

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much better on the ſubjects of morality and religion, than the antients have done, except the reaſon I have aſſigned. SERMON V.

In my former diſcourſes, I endeavoured to evince the creative, and preſerving power of God; and to deduce from thence, the obligation of religion on all beings poſſeſſing intellectual faculties in a degree equal to that of man. The ſhort queſtion now before us is, whether the light of natural reaſon be ſufficient to inſtruct us in the duties of religion; or a more expreſs revelation of God's will in thoſe particulars be neceſſary.

And in this diſcuſſion, our firſt object of enquiry will be, how far, on a full and fair inveſtigation of the powers of reaſon, uncultivated by ſcience, and common to mankind, they are calculated to lead us to that perfect knowledge of God; which is neceſſary to produce a correſponding knowledge of the duties we

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SERMON V. we owe Him; such a firm undoubting knowledge, as shall have a proper influence on our practice.

I propose in the second place, to confirm the result of such enquiry; by evincing from facts and experience, how far unassisted reason hath gone in promoting divine knowledge, and religious practice, among the characters most reputed for wisdom in the heathen world.

And in conclusion, we shall thirdly find it, from those enquiries, follow; that the best and purest system of religion, which unassisted reason can frame, will be defective in perspicuity, efficacy, and universality.

I. For the more clear elucidation of the argument I am now pursuing, it may be necessary to explain the terms. By the religion attainable by the powers of reason, is understood natural religion; a term used in distinction from revelation.

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revelation. And by NATURAL RELIGION I conſequently underſtand, not a ſenſe of religious duty ſtamped upon the human mind, and judging with innate diſcrimination of right and wrong: for, in this acceptation of the terms, the ſenſe of religious duty would be general and uniform, however the practice was. But the terms, in my conception of them, denote an obligation of duty, ariſing from our relation to our Creator, to which the mind is ſuppoſed to give an unerring aſſent; thereto induced by a natural aptitude, and congruity of our ideas to the divine nature and attributes. And thus conſidered, the mind muſt perfectly comprehend the nature of the object, and ground of that relation, from whence thoſe duties flow. SERMON V.

In what degree of perfection the mind might originally have come out of the hands of its Creator, how clear in its deciſions of right and wrong, how competent to judge of moral relations, to

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SERMON V.

ſway, and direct, our actions; while conſcience aſſiſted as a faithful monitor, unbiaſſed by prejudice, not warped by bad example; is a matter of too much diſputation, thereon to build an argument. With whatever readineſs of mind I may aſſent to the doctrine of primæval perfection; * I mean not to argue from it, as a fact. We are to conſider the powers of the human mind as we now find them, and as known experience from hiſtory repreſents them.

From the creative and preſerving power of God, it has been already proved, that all religious duties flow: the mind therefore muſt be perfectly clear in its conception of thoſe truths, in order perfectly to aſcertain the duties that reſult from them. How far competent natural reaſon, that is, reaſon in its uncultivated, unimproved ſtate, reaſon operating

* Vid. Concio de Statu Paradiſiaco.

on

on the mind in the maſs of mankind, is to the diſcovery and comprehenſion of thoſe two great and fundamental truths, on which hinge all the duties of religion; the train of reaſoning already uſed on thoſe ſubjects will clearly evince. And while it is demonſtrable, that without a full, and clear, and comprehenſive knowledge of thoſe fundamental doctrines, it is impoſſible to know the duties that reſult from them: it will follow, that a ſhorter, and eaſier method of inculcating the knowledge of thoſe doctrines, is neceſſary to a general comprehenſion of the duties ſo reſulting; as a clear comprehenſion of the duties, is neceſſary to the practice of them. SERMON V.

With regard to the exiſtence of the Deity, I would not have it underſtood, as from hence collected; that this momentous doctrine, the foundation of all religion, is abſolutely undiſcoverable by human reaſon: conſcious as I am of the rational evidence, by which it may be

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SERMON V.

demonstrated. But the general prevalence of assent to this great truth, in all ages of the world, hath, I conceive, been rather owing to an innate idea of such an existence, than a conviction of it by reason and argument. It may with certainty be affirmed, that the common capacity of mankind, is not capable of making this discovery by the mere force of reason: because it is only to be made in the use of such abstracted ideas, and such abstruse reasoning and manner of deduction, as is far beyond the reach and powers of mind, observable in the generality of men. And it would be unnecessary to repeat the arguments, that have been already produced in proof of that doctrine; or to offer such others, as might be proposed; to evince, that the plainest arguments of conviction, of which the nature of the subject is capable, it is above the level of an ordinary capacity, to frame, or even to comprehend the process and force of them.

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The ſame concluſion is equally in proof, reſpecting the governing and preſiding power of the Deity. Yet it muſt alſo, in regard to this doctrine, be acknowledged; that there are topics in great variety, which, if properly attended to, and by the inquiſitive and cultivated mind purſued, afford ample conviction of the reality of a divine providence. And the evidence, which ſuch arguments carry with them, has obtained the aſſent of the wiſeſt, the moſt learned, and the beſt men; among thoſe, who poſſeſſed not the advantages of revelation. But they are not arguments, that can be purſued by the generality of mankind: they are not ſo obvious, ſo ſhort, and clear; as to ſtamp that conviction on the rude, unlettered, vulgar mind; which vulgar minds require. The difficulties of reducing the proof of this great truth to any demonſtrative and ſcientific evidence are ſuch, as not only exceed the utmoſt reach of capacity in the illiterate multitude; but ſuch, as

SERMON V.

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SERMON V.

lie not very level to thoſe even of penetration and learning, who may not have accuſtomed themſelves to inveſtigations and ſtudies of that kind.

Under ſuch diſadvantages, well might the groſs of mankind, whole countries, run into wild idolatries and vain conceits: trembling under ideal apprehenſions of evil, and miſtaking the fountain of all good. Hence proſtrations that degraded, and pollutions that depraved human nature: hence the libidinous rites inſtituted in honour of the Gods, whoſe nature and whoſe pleaſures their grovling votaries held of a piece with their own: and hence the practiſers of every vice were taught to juſtify their conduct by the example of ſome of their Gods: hence the blind dread of offended powers, and altars ſtained with human blood, to avert the effects of divine diſpleaſure: and hence, in fine, the vileſt works of Hell, done under a blind pretence of pleaſing Heaven.

Indeed

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Indeed what better effect could mere, unaſſiſted, human reaſon have been expected to produce in the world: indeciſive and unſatisfactory as its powers have, on the moſt accurate inveſtigation of them, been found; when employed on thoſe elevated ſubjects, the nature of the Deity, and the duties of man reſulting from his relation to Him? Nor is ſuch light incompetent to direct the maſs of mankind only, the ignorant and vulgar, in their duty to the Deity; but even the wiſe and learned, who had no better guide, thoſe who had made the acquiſition of knowledge the buſineſs of their lives; even thoſe men we ſhall find confirming the reſult of the preceding enquiry: as I propoſed in the ſecond place to exemplify, and from facts and experience to evince, how far they in their reſpective ages went, in promoting divine knowledge, and religious practice.

II. The firſt great authority I will cite, was Anaxagoras; who appears to

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SERMON V.

have been the firſt materialiſt on record in the world. He ſuppoſed matter to have been ſelf-exiſtent, a rude chaotic maſs: from whence he raiſes a ſublimated principle, which he ſtiles Intelligence, who fought this ſtubborn maſs; and the iſſue of the conflict was the fair frame and order of things, which we behold. From ſuch an idea of the Supreme Being, we may expect a conſiſtent notion of the duties of religion. And ſo it was: as may be collected from his anſwer to a very important queſtion, and much to the purpoſe of our preſent inveſtigation. The queſtion was, "for "what purpoſe man was created?" and our wiſe man's anſwer was, "to con-"template the Sun, Moon, and Hea-"vens." Vain, futile philoſopher! And is this the vaſt extent, to which reaſon will ſoar? Aſk the poor unlettered diſciple of Chriſt the queſtion; and he will return a very different anſwer. He will tell thee, man was made, to proclaim his great Creator's praiſe; with

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with heart-felt raptures to adore that power and goodneſs, which called him into exiſtence; to endeavour in his proper ſtation, by an intereſted diſcharge of the ſocial and relative duties, to contribute to the general happineſs of the creation, to watch and to ſubdue each irregular ſtart of paſſion, to purify and fit the ſoul for a ſtate of higher bliſs. SERMON V.

Examine the notions of Ariſtippus, and the Cyrenaic ſect, concerning the Deity: and what do they tend to inculcate; but principles of Atheiſm, and polytheiſtic practice: an accommodating creed, without any influence on our life and actions: no conception of benefits received from God, nor of duties on the part of man exacted in acknowledgment of them. They had no general line of conduct: but each was ready with quaint apothegms * to defend

* Habeo Laida; non habeor a Laide.
Vid. Cic. in Epiſt. et 2. de Fin.

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SERMON V.

the practices, to which inclination respectively led him. Each was a law unto himself; gluttonous, licentious, ostentatious or mean, as they felt themselves individually by humour, habit, and disposition addicted.

Aristotle, than whom the schools of philosophy never boasted a more nice enquirer into the nature of things, acknowledged indeed the immateriality of the Divine Being, and his providence too; but limited that providence to the charge of the cœlestial bodies, which he supposed by sympathy to influence and direct the course of the world, we inhabit: an idea this, which removes the Deity at a distance from us; and is therefore a principle ill-calculated, whereon to ground religious duties. *

Plato caught a glimmering of light from the father of moral philosophy.

* Vid. Diog. Laert. Vit. Philosoph.

He

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He assigned the direction of human affairs immediately to the care of the Gods: and seemed to have a more adequate conception of the nature of the Deity, of the human mind, and other truths connected with those sublime subjects, even than the inquisitive Aristotle himself. But he had travelled into Ægypt in quest of knowledge: might there have gleaned some scattered fragments of traditional truths, which the Jews in their long commoration in that country had left behind them; and derived the superiour illumination of his mind from a stronger light, than unassisted reason affords. SERMON V.

What shall we say of Socrates? That he conceived an idea of the unity of the Deity: whom he insulted by a weak adherence to a ridiculous system of polytheism.

I will not rake farther into the follies and extravagances of a number of other sages;

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SERMON V.

ſages; who took upon them the arduous taſk of inſtructing mankind in the knowledge of God, the nature of the human mind, and the duties of life from the relation of man to his creator ariſing. The preceding reflections will ſufficiently evince this reſulting truth: that the natural powers of the uninformed mind are not competent to that clear comprehenſion of God and providence; which is neceſſary to eſtabliſh ſuch conviction, as ſhall produce amongſt mankind a uniform and conſiſtent practice of religious duties.

This has been proved on the incontrovertible authority of fact and experience, in the varying and doubtful opinions, not of the rude illiterate vulgar; nor yet of chiefs and ſtateſmen, whoſe minds may have been ſuppoſed too much engaged in ſcenes of active life, to have allowed leiſure for ſober ſpeculative purſuits; but of thoſe learned and beſt-informed characters, who had ſacrificed all

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all worldly avocations to the ſtudy of wiſdom, and made the acquiſition of knowledge not only the chief, but the ſole buſineſs of their lives. SERMON V.

III. But ſuppoſing the opinions of philoſophic men to have been more uniform and conſiſtent, than we have found them: ſtill a religion deduced from them would want, as was obſerved in the third and laſt place, perſpicuity, efficacy, and univerſality.

I. It muſt want perſpicuity; conſiſting, as it has been ſhewn, in a long train of abſtract reaſoning: which to different perſons would appear more or leſs obvious, as individuals are more or leſs perſpicacious, apprehenſive, and acute. Thoſe arguments likewiſe would be always liable to miſconceptions and miſconſtruction; and diffidence in opinion would produce diverſity in practice. The fundamental truths of religion muſt be plain and clear: a direct declaration of facts,

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SERMON V.

facts, not supported by abstruse reasoning; but by, what would constitute a much firmer foundation, a direct appeal to the senses in the performance of miracles. The doctrine, in this case proposed to be believed, is a plain assertion; and my assent is grounded on what I feel, or hear, or see. Thus, if our reason can comprehend, that facts may be as they are represented; if our senses be convinced, that they are so; this is all the satisfaction, the mind can require; and this is a conviction suited to every mind.

II. In respect to its efficacy, as the doctrines, on which such a religion rests, must consist of very disputable points, and doubtful disquisitions: they would not carry with them conviction strong enough to influence the practice of those, to whom they are addressed; scarcely of those, who themselves might propose them. They might believe them; but belief and conviction are very different principles,

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principles, and will be found on practice to have very different effects. Elſe the great heathen philoſopher, above alluded to, at the awful hour of diſſolution, when he was going to meet that ineffably great and glorious Exiſtence, whom his conception had figured to him as the Creator and Preſerver of Heaven and Earth, would not have ventured to inſult Him with neglect; and, in weak and ſervile compliance with his country's ſilly ſuperſtitions, direct a ſacrifice to be offered to an imaginary individual of a ridiculous polytheiſtic tribe. Would a converted chriſtian, under the ſame circumſtance of prejudice in favour of his country's ceremonious rites, at ſuch awful period have been induced by any conſideration to trample on the croſs of Chriſt? This is not a queſtion of ſpeculation; the affirmative of which on one ſide is as good, as the negative on the other: we can produce facts and experience in a hundred inſtances, to prove he would not. SERMON V.

III. And

SERMON V.

III. And laſtly, ſuch a religion muſt want univerſality: for it is a religion calculated not for the generality of mankind, but for a nation of philoſophers. For thoſe philoſophers, were they ever ſo throughly perſuaded of the truth of it themſelves, could not explain it to the ignorant multitude: they could never bring thoſe arduous doctrines of refined ſpeculation to a level with rude uncultivated minds. And though, from the reputation of their wiſdom and knowledge, they ſhould poſſeſs ſufficient influence with the vulgar, to obtain a tacit conſent to the doctrines they taught: as they could propoſe them with no other force, than merely the weight of their own private opinions; they could be ſuppoſed to have little influence on the lives and morals of thoſe, to whoſe inferiour underſtandings they were addreſſed. Stooping with pliant minds to their opinions, ſome might believe; others would doubt; and, as ſuch a religion muſt depend on deductions of reaſon, others

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others again would form different conclusions. Self-love and self-satisfaction, under the guidance of natural inclination, would individually communicate different appearances to doctrines of mere opinion: and scarcely one single point of duty would be received with such concurrent confidence and common assent; as to influence practice, against present interest, the sollicitation of pleasure, the indulgence of ease.

But if, after all that has been urged, we are still to be told, "that a wise and good God cannot impose on mankind any thing relating to religion, that may not be discovered by the human mind without the assistance of *foreign* instruction, or that is not immediately founded in the nature of things:"* having shewn, from the greatest authorities in the most polished parts of the ancient world, that the case is otherwise; that certain duties

* Christianity as old as the Creation.

are

SERMON V.

are required of mankind, founded on doctrines and relations, which natural reaſon does not clearly make known: I might aſk, in turn, in what period of the world it was generally otherwiſe; when thoſe characters exiſted, who, by the natural powers of the mind, diſcovered the doctrines and duties of pure religion? And I know but one ſatisfactory reply that could be made; which would be, by confronting hiſtorical evidence with hiſtory.

There is an antient hiſtory, that informs us of the primæval ſtate of man: when he lived in perfect innocence and happineſs. In that ſtate indeed he muſt have been poſſeſſed of a perfect knowledge of his duty, "without any foreign inſtruction." For without knowing it, he could not perform it: without performing it, he could not have been perfectly innocent: and unleſs perfectly innocent, he could not have been perfectly happy. Thus exactly conſonant with the ſentiment,

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ment, which from the lip of ſcepticiſm I have juſt cited, do we find this very antient hiſtory deſcribe the primitive ſtate and condition of mankind. Agreeable to it, God is repreſented as impoſing on man no duty, of which he did not know and comprehend the force. SERMON V.

The account of human nature and human manners, which that hiſtory ſupplies, informs us, that *though God created man perfect, he had found out many devices.* That is, that he poſſeſſed at his creation powers of mind, competent to diſcern what was right, and ſufficient rectitude of inclination to prompt him to purſue it. But that, notwithſtanding ſuch competence to know, and ability to perform, his duty, he had deviated in his conduct into many devices; into poſitive acts of diſobedience: that a deterioration of his nature ſucceeded; that his underſtanding became obſcured, and a ſenſe of right and wrong leſs ſenſibly affected him. And, conſiſtent with this hiſtorical narrative,

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SERMON V.

the proofs, that have been above offered, extracted chiefly from the antient biographer * of those characters, whose learning and love of wisdom obtained to them the distinguished appellation of philosophers, abundantly evince; that in the deteriorated, depraved state of human nature, they were acquainted neither with the doctrines, nor duties, of pure religion.

In consideration of such experienced corruption, such deterioration of human nature, this volume proceeds to unfold the dispensations of Divine Providence; and explain those mysteries, that meet in the moral conduct of mankind. It instructs us, that to supply the defect in the natural light of reason, God promised, and according to his promise gave, mankind an additional light; or, to preserve the words of the author in the sentiments quoted above, *a foreign*

* Diogenes Laertius.

instruc-

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inſtruction, * conveyed in ſo clear and explicit terms and manner, that nothing is wanting to the comprehenſion of it, but an eye that will ſee, and a heart diſpoſed to underſtand. SERMON V.

I have mentioned this hiſtory, and this little abſtract from it, only as the ſuggeſtion of an object worth inveſtigating: as it may tend to reconcile to truth, and to explain the favourite opinion of thoſe, who aſſert that God muſt have endowed man with natural powers of mind, ſufficient to enable him to know His will, and to practiſe it. If the truth of it, as relating to a primæval ſtate of perfection, be queſtioned; I might, in ſupport of ſuch doctrine, cite antient poets and philoſophers, of moſt eminence in the heathen world, inculcating the ſame opinion †. If the preſumed authority of that volume be treated with an affected air of ridicule; we may tell thoſe

* See page 143.

† Vide Concio de Statu Paradiſiaco.

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SERMON V.

who treat it thus, and it would ſurprize many, who take their ſhadowy religion on the credit of others, to be told; that ſome of the ableſt and moſt learned men, this country ever produced, have not only been private believers, but public defenders of the doctrinal truths, which that volume contains. And it would be equally mortifying on their part, to obſerve to them; that the adverſaries of revealed religion, in this country, have been generally men of very ſuperficial learning; ſuch as have ſeldom waded into the depths of ſcience, or contributed to the advancement of erudition and knowledge in any material article: contenting themſelves, by an affectation of ſingularity, a love of cavil, and parade of words, with a cheaper purchaſe of fame. That by men of this deſcription we may never ſuffer ourſelves to be laughed out of our religion, out of our preſent comfort, and our future hopes, may God of His infinite mercy grant, &c.

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SERMON VI.

John iv. 2.

Salvation is of the Jews.

SERMON VI.

To aſcertain, how far natural reaſon was competent to diſcover the duties of pure religion, was the object of my laſt diſcourſe: which, flowing from a juſt apprehenſion of the divine nature, and the relation in which we ſtand to the Supreme Being, muſt depend for their propriety and uniformity on the reach of our ideas, as directed to that ſublime ſubject; and the equal extent of them. If they be inadequate to the ſubject, the duties will be imperfect; if they vary in individuals, larger and more comprehenſive in ſome than others, the

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SERMON VI.

rule of duty founded on them must be vague and varying. And from the preceding investigation it was by proof and example evinced; that not only the mass of mankind, but even the wise and learned, entertained very different notions of the divine nature, and had varying and very imperfect ideas of the relative duties of man to his Creator: that, from such discrepance of opinion, no general rule of practice could be formed; nor on the moral conduct of mankind could such imperfect knowledge, as they possessed, of God and religion, have sufficient influence.

Many of them conceived false and injurious notions of God: and the opinions even of those, who might be nearer the truth, were too much involved in doubts and obscurity, to be efficacious in gaining them to a strict and uniformly religious life; much less in promoting the practice of religion among the multitude. Yet the creative and preserving

preſerving goodneſs of God, it was in- SERMON VI.
ferred,* demand from beings endowed with a degree of reaſon, equal to that of man, a return of rational ſervice; or, in other words, the obſervance of religious duties. And to practiſe religion in purity and truth, we muſt underſtand its doctrines and commands. We muſt comprehend them clearly, we muſt be throughly convinced of the divine authority, that inſtituted and enjoined them: or they will have no efficacy on our lives. If therefore the light of nature be not competent to this effect; God, who conferred that light on us, as he eaſily could, ſo we muſt conclude as readily would, confer on us a ſupplemental aid, ſome ſtronger and clearer light. How ſuch ſupplemental aid may be conferred, we will next proceed to enquire.

He, who endowed the cultivated mind with ſufficient powers, by long and la-

* See page 86, &c.

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SERMON VI.

borious operations of reaſon to learn to know Him, can no doubt as eaſily communicate to the mind ſuch knowledge of Himſelf ſome ſhorter way, by immediate illumination; a ray of intuitive knowledge, lighting to certain truths, to any truths, that are not above the natural graſp of that mind. For inſtance, the mind can conceive the idea of a firſt cauſe, infinitely active and powerful. This knowledge may be acquired, through the medium of a long chain of reaſoning: or it may be communicated to that mind ſupernaturally and immediately. But to comprehend the manner of God's exiſtence, exceeds the reach of human intelligence. This is a degree of knowledge, which cannot be acquired by any exertions of reaſon: nor can it be immediately and ſupernaturally communicated to the human mind. For to receive ſuch degree of knowledge, the mind itſelf muſt be altered, its capacity enlarged, its nature changed: but change the nature of the mind,

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mind, and you unmake the man. Hence then we find no apparent difficulty in conceiving a ſupernatural communication of knowledge: and we alſo learn, what kind and degree of knowledge may be to the mind thus ſupernaturally and inſtantaneouſly communicated; viz. any knowledge, which the mind by the operation of reaſon is capable in a natural way of acquiring. And the man thus divinely illuminated is as capable of communicating to others ſuch illumination of knowledge, as he who may have acquired it in the ordinary way; and indeed with greater weight; for he feels it, and communicates it as a divine impreſſion, and therefore an incontrovertible truth.

SERMON VI.

But the mere belief of internal illuminations, is no proof that we poſſeſs them: for thoſe fancied feelings, that are boaſted by many of weak heads and warm imaginations, are as impreſſive as real ones: we may be deceived by them ourſelves,

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SERMON VI.

ourſelves, and thereby led to deceive others. There is need therefore of ſome external proof of the truth and reality of our pretenſions: and no ſurer or more ſatisfactory one can be conceived, than the performance of acts, which exceed the ordinary powers of nature. They are direct appeals to the ſenſes; and when the experience of internal illuminations is attended with ſuch characters of external evidence; it acts with all the force of conviction truth can give, and has a claim to rational aſſent. Indeed it is capable of proof, that internal illuminations cannot exiſt, unattended with ſome external character of authenticity. For whom would the perſon, who could produce no other proofs of the reality of his mental illuminations, than his own feelings, convince? And without the power of convincing others, what would be the uſe of ſuch illuminations? And without a uſe, or purpoſe, and a good one too, it is hard to conceive that God, who does nothing in vain,

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vain, ſhould diſtinguiſh any individual with ſuch ſupernatural gifts and powers. SERMON VI.

The poſſibility of divine illuminations being thus evinced, and the characteriſtic marks diſtinguiſhed, which authoriſe their currency, and eſtabliſh their truth; the next point of enquiry is, whether any ſuch illumination, revealing God's will in a more expreſs, and clear, and conciſe manner, than by arguments and abſtruſe reaſoning, hath ever taken place; and whether the purpoſe to be promoted by it was ſuch, as would juſtify the divine interpoſition.

Nations and countries have not varied more in their civil, than in their religious inſtitutions. Some nations, in their opinions of the divine nature, have divided it into a multiplicity of Gods: and ſome have materialiſed it; for the Creator miſtaking, and worſhipping, his works. Great and vain men have taken advantage of this general principle of religion,

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SERMON VI.

ligion, which poſſeſſes the minds of all mankind; pretended the uſeful arts they invented, or their ſucceſſes in war, thoſe to have been the communications of their Gods, and theſe atchieved by their aſſiſtance: and from thence obtained, amongſt their reſpective countrymen, the opinion of being the diſtinguiſhed favourites of Heaven, and after death the honours of Deification.

The moſt antient people, of which prophane hiſtory profeſſes to give us any account, are the Ægyptians and Chaldæans: and of their hiſtories the earlieſt period, to which we can refer, is the time of Seſoſtris; about a thouſand, or, as ſome contend, fifteen hundred, years before Chriſt. And the earlieſt repreſentation, which the page of hiſtory holds out to us, of their religion and morals, diſcovers them to have been immerſed in the groſſeſt idolatry. Nor do the records of Greece afford us a more advantageous account of their moſt priſtine

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priſtine ſtate. The imaginary exiſtences of deceaſed men were the only Gods, they knew; their will, when living, the only rule of morals the people acknowledged; and their vices, after they were dead, the ſanction of inceſt, ambition, and outrage of every kind. SERMON VI.

If, amidſt ſuch an idolatrous world, there were a people, who thought and acted otherwiſe; who acknowledged one only God, the Creator and Upholder of all things; who paid Him a conſiſtent ſervice; who lived in the habitual practice of duties reſulting from a proper knowledge, a love, a fear, a reverence of Him: we can account for ſuch knowledge, and ſuch conſiſtent practice, only two ways. One is, that thoſe people muſt have been more wiſe and pious, not only than any other nation under Heaven; but than a nation, could ſuch an one be conceived, compoſed of individuals the moſt diſtinguiſhed for ſuperiour wiſdom and erudition,

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SERMON VI.

erudition, a ſelect nation of philoſophers. Or elſe, that extraordinary degree of knowledge, they poſſeſſed, muſt have been communicated to them ſome other way; than by the mere exertion of the natural powers of reaſon. The firſt of theſe ſuppoſitions certainly was not the caſe. The Jews aſſuredly did not poſſeſs more learning, than the reſt of the nations, among whom they lived: but it may on the contrary be aſſerted, that in the early periods of that nation, before their emigration from Ægypt, indeed till the reigns of David and Solomon, they poſſeſſed leſs. The higheſt encomium on their great prince and legiſlator reſpecting his erudition was, that he *was ſkilled in all the learning of the Ægyptians*: a direct acknowledgment, that he had not acquired his learning and knowledge from his own countrymen; but from a people more learned and intelligent than they were; and of courſe more capable of inſtructing him. The latter hypotheſis muſt be therefore the true one:

and

and it consequently follows, that their knowledge of God and religion had been communicated to them by some shorter, clearer, more convincing, more influencing way. SERMON VI.

And as such supernatural interposition of God, in revealing his will to mankind by an immediate illumination of the mind, that is, by inspiration, must have a sufficient assignable cause: if we enquire the purpose to be promoted in the instance before us; we shall find it the noblest, the most important, that can be conceived worthy to engage the divine interference. It was to keep alive in the human mind the almost extinguished principles of true religion; to teach and inforce the knowledge of God, and the relative duties of all rational beings from thence resulting: that the most elevated point of human knowledge; and this the first great duty of mankind. In pity to human weakness and infirmity, which to the most vile and abject prostrations

SERMON VI.

trations had reduced the original perfect and dignified character of man, was this revelation made. Formed with a mind competent to know, and taught to commune with, his Creator; ſtill bearing the faint impreſſion of His goodneſs, but loſt to every proper idea of His nature; he had humbled himſelf to the worſhip of an animal, a plant, a ſtock, or a ſtone. And from that abyſs of ignorance to recover and reinſtate him in the rank of intelligence, he once poſſeſſed; was a purpoſe abundant to juſtify the interpoſition of God, in employing the only means equal to ſuch an effect.

But beſides the end or purpoſe aſſignable for ſuch divine interference: ſome further evidence of the reality of it, as hath been already premiſed, is wanting. And no evidence can be produced ſo eaſy of conception, and ſo aſſuredly to be depended on, as miracles: the poſſibility of which having in a *former diſ-

* See Sermon xi.

courſe

courſe been evinced, * we will now enter farther into the ſubject, and conſider the circumſtances neceſſary to authenticate the performance of them. SERMON VI.

By a miracle, we underſtand a ſenſible effect exceeding the known powers of nature. But as we are utterly ignorant, how far the powers of beings, good or bad, in ſuperior claſſes of intelligence, may extend; we cannot be certain, that ſome phœnomena, which appear, and are, to us really miraculous, may not have reſulted from their agency. And it therefore follows, that miracles are not ſeparately, and in themſelves, proofs, that the workers of them are delegated meſſengers of God. Yet as it is highly repugnant to all our natural notions of the divine goodneſs, to ſuppoſe that He can leave men, who deſire to know and follow truth, deſtitute of the neceſſary

* See Sermon ii. p. 38, &c.

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SERMON VI.

means of discriminating it from falsehood; it also follows, that there must ever be some discernible traits and adjuncts, which mark and manifest His interposition. By what characters then are the miracles of true religion distinguishable from deceptions? By plain peculiarities, as I conceive, in their nature, manners, and tendency.

We are, it is confessed, ignorant how far the power of evil spirits may extend: but we know how far it cannot extend: we know it is infinitely inferiour to the power of God. Upon this principle, reason, concurring with scripture, appropriates some wonderful acts of a particular kind to God Himself, and as proceeding only from Him: such as the prediction of distant contingencies, depending upon the wills of free agents; and the ability with unerring knowledge of disclosing the privacy of human thoughts. That an idea prevailed in the heathen world, of the possibility of those facts,

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facts, appears from the endeavours used to establish the belief of them. What else was the pretence of their oracles? How vain and futile such attempts, I will not go about to prove. I will not intrude on your time by exposing the futile boasts of augury, and the vain pretensions of such pillars of the art, as Nævius: his arrogated knowledge of human thoughts, a plain, palpable, collusive juggle between his prince and him, to procure confidence from an ignorant multitude, without authentic vouchers, without sufficient end;

SERMON VI.

——— "Nodus non NUMINE dignus."

An observation this, which leads me to consider some attendant circumstances in extraordinary acts, as constituting another proof of their immediate procedure from God. As, when they are public, performed openly before great numbers; and when the result of them is a notoriously permanent effect. These, if not equally infallible marks of the

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SERMON VI.

finger of God, as the ſuper-natural operation itſelf, are corroborating proofs, amongſt others, that they proceed from divine power; that they are true and real miracles, and not, like thoſe aſcribed to magicians, oracles, and heathen augurs, the illuſions of artifice, and pretenſions of falſhood and impoſture.

The tendency of thoſe wonderful acts, or the purpoſes for which they were wrought, is likewiſe, as hath been intimated, a teſt of their divinity. A miracle, that tends to no purpoſe, or to a bad one, is on thoſe very accounts ſuſpicious. If the all-wiſe and good God ever ſuſpend, or alter, the eſtabliſhed courſe of nature; it muſt be for ſome wiſe and good cauſe: for ſome important end, which could not otherwiſe be obtained. It muſt be immediately, or ultimately, for the removal of ſome pernicious and ſpreading errors, or the confirmation of ſome momentous truths; in order to render mankind wiſer and better.

ter. When therefore we are convinced, that miracles bear the characters above represented, are also attended with the marks and distinctions just described; and that the ends, which in this enumeration of circumstantial evidence I have specified, are intended by them: we may be assured, that they proceed not from wicked spirits, such supposition implying a contradiction in ideas; as it is contrary to their nature to promote good: and by consequence, that they are, and can be, only from God. SERMON VI.

After these premised observations, let us proceed to take a general view of the revelation made to the Jews. All nations have in their respective religious institutions pretended to prophecies, miracles, and mysteries; and considered such powers and discoveries to have been conferred on favoured individuals by the predilection and good-will of their Gods; which, though it do not prove, that the world in every special part of it has had

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SERMON VI.

a revelation; yet plainly evinces, that, by the judgment of the whole world, there was reaſon to expect, and believe one. Till the time of Moſes, the records of hiſtory were traditional: at leaſt, we have no aſſurance, till then, of any written ones. He firſt digeſted the antient accounts of hiſtorical facts; and committed them to writing. And in regard to the narrative of antient facts, which he delivers, and had received from tradition; it is to be obſerved, that thoſe traditions, from the longevity of the Ante-diluvians, had not in the courſe of deſcent paſſed through many reporters: * and the hiſtorian ſeems to have related them without the leaſt prejudice or partiality to himſelf or his nation. Nor doth tradition, permit em to obſerve, carry an inconſiderable weight with it; or claim a moderate degree of aſſent, when there appears nothing to confront, or diſprove it. And this is

* See Paſcal's Thoughts.

ſo

so far the case in the instance before us, that succeeding historians have in general points followed Moses's relation. They have followed him in his record of the creation of the world from a rude chaotic mass; of a paradisiacal age; of the deterioration of the world, through the vices of mankind; of an universal deluge. SERMON VI.

From the diluvian period, this history informs us, that in one particular family, that family which survived the general catastrophe, the belief of the unity of God, creator and preserver of the world, obtained: that in one particular branch of that family, amidst its various migrations, in its prosperous and depressed state, whether independent, or in bondage, amidst idolatrous people, oppressed by the tyranny of idolatrous masters, it still remained, and of all the nations of the world alone maintained, that doctrine. It was this doctrine, that united them so closely to one another, and so continuedly sepa-

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SERMON VI.

rated them from all the world; as in itself forms a perpetual miracle.

In the time of Moſes, this family was increaſed to a numerous people: and as they had before been ſeparated from the reſt of the world by their religious principles, they were then to be divided from it in ſituation, and by an appropriated inheritance; to be delivered from ſervitude, and become a diſtinct and independent nation. For that purpoſe the God, whom they ſerved, raiſed them up a deliverer; and empowered him, by a ſignal diſplay of miraculous powers, to lead out from amidſt a powerful and warlike nation an oppreſſed, unarmed, defenceleſs multitude: who were thus led forth, ſeparated, and ſupported, to preſerve, and diffuſe among the reſt of the world, the almoſt obliterated notions of true Theiſm, and the pure worſhip of the One God. And if any purpoſe, if any end, could juſtify the ſupernatural interpoſition of Almighty God in the diſplay

display of miracles, this unqueſtionably did. SERMON VII.

The religion of the Jews had been hitherto plain and ſimple: conſiſting in the knowledge of the Divine Unity, and the nature of that ſpiritual worſhip, which was due to Him. But the people were now to become a great and powerful nation: and their religion, deſtined within its pale to comprehend, and to bleſs the whole world, was now to take a new form; its eſſentials to be fenced with rites, and ceremonies, and uſages, which had a further aſpect than Moſes ſaw, and led to a wider extent. Whatever of allegory there may poſſibly be in ſome part of that prophet's writings, and ſuch there probably is; it militates not againſt the fundamental truth of the relation: the facts repreſented under theſe allegories are plain; and have, as well as the more nude repreſentation of things, an unqueſtionable claim to our aſſent. And in his general detail of facts, ſo allegoriſed and repreſented, it may be further obſerved,

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SERMON VI.

obſerved, that ſome of the graveſt and beſt informed philoſophers of antiquity have followed him.

This religion reſolves itſelf into a triple diviſion: the prophetic, moral, and ceremonial: they are well deſigned parts in one great building; each of diſtinct purpoſe, and deſign; and all neceſſary to the perfection of the whole. The prophecies ſtamp on it the character of divinity: without the moral part, as a rule of conduct it would be defective: and the ceremonial part illuſtrates the prophetic.

As to the prophetic declarations of Moſes, and the ſucceſſion of prophets, that followed him, they have in the moſt exact and unequivocal manner been fulfilled: down from the firſt prophecy of *the woman's ſeed, which ſhould bruiſe the ſerpent's head*; to that dreadful mention of the future deſolation of their city; with the aggravating circumſtance of the people being reduced to ſuch extremity of

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of diſtreſs, as to be forced to *eat the fleſh of their ſons and their daughters*: a prophecy, which was dreadfully fulfilled at the ſiege of Jeruſalem by Titus. Examine other predictions, reſpecting more recent times; and you will find ſome fulfilled, and others every day fulfilling. SERMON VI.

The moral part, an univerſal rule of conduct, was to continue the ſame always and every where: cuſtom cannot change it, time cannot render it obſolete, nor will even the plea of neceſſity excuſe the obſervance of it. *Though heaven and earth paſs away, not one jot, or one tittle, of the moral law ſhall fail.*

But the ritual and ceremonial part of that religion was figurative and typical; even in the perſon of the great legiſlator himſelf. He was ſent by God to be a deliverer. But out of Sion, as the apoſtle argues, came the true Deliverer; a Deliverer in that extenſive ſenſe of the word, in which the Meſſiah is deſcribed by

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SERMON VI.

by the prophets: a Deliverer, through whom all the world ſhould be ſaved. The inſtitution of ſacrifices, which originated in the earlieſt ages of the world, and in every part of it prevailed, apart from reverence to that great ſacrifice deſtined to be made in the perſon of the Meſſiah, is of all ſtrange practices the moſt inexplicable. On any other ground conſidered, the cuſtom of offering up ſlaughtered animals, to expiate human offences, muſt appear to have proceeded from the wildeſt notions, the imagination of man had ever conceived. But an enthuſiaſtic conceit, without any reaſonable pretence, ſeldom laſts long; and never could become univerſal. The univerſality of the practice therefore adds to the improbability, ſhall I call it, or impoſſibility of it; except founded in reaſon and truth. And the reaſon and the truth of it can only conſiſt, in its aſpect to the great ſacrifice deſtined in Chriſt; and are evidenced in the long continuation of the practice prefigured.

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The deliverance from the bondage of Egypt is a type of the deliverance of mankind from the bondage of ſin; each preceded by ſimilar circumſtances, one of the Paſchal feaſt, and the other of Chriſt's laſt ſupper; the one plainly prefigured by the other, and both conſpiring to mark, beyond the poſſibility of miſtake, the grand ante-type of our redemption. What do their frequent ablutions ſignify, but what Chriſt ſeems to allude to; the purity of the heart? *Ye hypocrites*, ſays he, *ye are very careful in waſhing the outſide of the cup and platter; but within ye are full of all uncleanlineſs.* That is, ye blind, who can carry your eye no farther than the type; than the mere ordinance, perfectly inſignificant without a reference to the reaſon, the ground, and the ſubſtantiality of it. In ſhort, it is not difficult, in moſt of their ceremonies, to diſcover an aſpect to a future reality: thoſe temporary inſtitutions tending, like ſo many elucidating circumſtances, to point out that Redeemer; SERMON VI.

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SERMON VI.

deemer; in whom they were taught to expect a final and compleat salvation.

And those external observances whose references and allusions lay less open to explanation, so rigidly exacted, and so strictly observed, do in no small degree contribute to stamp on it the evidence of divine authority. Burthensome as they certainly are, ridiculous as in some instances they may appear, silly and fantastical as they have sometimes been held; even those rites and ceremonies, contribute like under-parts to the one great design; the proof, that it is of more than human institution. Besides the typical reference some of them contain: others have been observed * to strike at idolatrous customs; and were calculated to guard the true Theist from heathen practices, and every tendency to idol service.

* Vid. Spencer de Leg. Heb.

And

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And conſidered alſo in another view, they equally demand our admiration, and claim a rational aſſent to the divine original of the inſtitution. For what private man can be ſuppoſed, without the authority of ſtation, unſupported by the arm of power, to have had ſuch influence over a whole nation; as, by his bare recommendation, to induce them to burthen themſelves with ſuch a grievous load of vain rites and futile ordinances, vain and futile if conſidered only with a view to the inſtitutions themſelves, as the Jews bound themſelves to obſerve? What individual, unleſs divinely authoriſed, would have preſumed to perſuade a whole nation, to abridge themſelves of ſo many gratifications, which the reſt of the world enjoyed; and to ſubmit implicity to ſuch reſtraints, particularly reſpecting the obſervance of the Sabbath, as might be, and was often really, prejudicial to them not only in a private, but a public capacity? And, with leſs than divine ſupport, what individual

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SERMON VI.

individual could in ſo arduous an undertaking have prevailed? What other motive, what weaker authority, what inferiour power, can human ſagacity conceive; of ſufficient urgency, to influence a numerous people to obſerve the ceremonies above alluded to, from the firſt period of their inſtitution to the preſent day, through a ſucceſſion of more than three thouſand years, with that uninterrupted and rigid adherence, with which the whole nation of the Jews have embraced them?

Examine the direct and immediate miracles of Moſes, from the time of croſſing the Red Sea to the approach of the people to the promiſed land, the principal of which are recapitulated by him in the 11th chapter of Deuteronomy, according to the criteria above laid down: and you will find in them every intrinſic mark of genuine truth and authenticity. They were ſenſible effects, exceeding the known powers

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powers of human nature: they were so plain that every ſenſe was convinced of them; and as public, as the preſence of multitudes could render them. They were inſtantaneous and compleat: and the reſult of them was a notorious and permanent effect. The internal character of divine power, diſplayed in the performance of them, is marked by the doctrine, which they tended to eſtabliſh; the doctrine of pure Theiſm: and the effect, that hath been already experienced from them, is the acknowledgment of that doctrine by the much greater part of the globe. SERMON VI.

What then do we collect from the preceding obſervations, reſpecting the nature and extent of the religion of the Jews? Briefly this: that it is founded in truth, imperfect in its inſtitution, extenſive in its influence. It was not a religion, conſiſting of fopperies borrowed from different nations, framed by different perſons, and put together at different

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SERMON VI.

times, one superadded to another. It was the stupendous work of one man: by him proposed to a numerous people; from the moment it was proposed, by that people universally received; and to the present period of time uninterruptedly observed. The purity of it was guarded with uncommon caution: for fear of introducing corruptions into it, the interests of policy were disregarded, and national advantages overlooked; the people were restricted from intermarriages with other nations, and thereby precluded from strengthening themselves by those advantageous alliances, which from such ties are often derived. A numerous and respectable priesthood was instituted and supported: their sole charge the conservation of the pure religion committed to them; the employment of their lives the duties and service of it. It involved their whole law, and by the priests was read and expounded to the people every week. And does not all this form, and care, and ceremony; this so expedite pro-

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promulgation, ſo ready and general acceptance of it, even had it wanted thoſe genuine characters of divinity, which miracles ſtamped on it, mark its pre-eminence to every other religion of the world; and demonſtrate its truth? SERMON VI.

But with all thoſe characters of divinity and truth, it was imperfect. Its rites and ceremonies diſcovered nothing intrinſically wiſe and good: they were plain alluſions to ſomething that was to ſucceed. And even its moral part, though far as it went compleat, was deſtined to receive improvement. It was very indeciſive in its doctrine of a future ſtate: its promiſes were national, temporal; as to period of time uncertain, and probably diſtant. To ſome future period they were taught to direct their views: and thither they looked, as for the completion of their greatneſs, ſo likewiſe for the perfection of their knowledge. They wanted direct and ſatisfactory information on many points: left by the provi-

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SERMON VI.

dence of God, on many important articles, involved in a degree of darkneſs; in order to add luſtre to the advent of that eminent perſonage, they were taught to expect, the Meſſiah; who, when he came, *would teach them all things.*

As to the influence of this religion, whether regarding time or place, ſo extenſive was it; that it was deſtined to reach from pole to pole, and to continue to the end of the world. All nations were comprehended in its promiſes; and the gradual performance of them, proceeding with time, was ordained to be completed and perfected in immortality.

This religion, in its rites and ceremonies, in whatever parts of it were prefigurative and typical, is now a dead religion; no longer engaging the attention of mankind, or claiming their obſervance of it. But its moral parts, far as its doctrines go, are unchangeably good.

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good. Let us therefore conſider it as a valuable relic: let us regard it with that reverence, it merits: a light, firſt ſhining in an obſcure place, but from the time, when it was given, increaſing in brightneſs more and more; and in its deſtined period breaking out in meridian luſtre: its rays ſtill continuing to diverge; until its *light ſhall lighten the Gentiles*, and all the world ſhall acknowledge THE GLORY OF ISRAEL. SERMON VI.

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SERMON VII.

Matt. xxii. 42.

What think ye of Christ?

SERMON VII.

IN the great concern of instructing mankind in the knowledge of God, and the duties from thence resulting, we have seen how far the powers of reason went: its incompetence to that effect hath been proved from fact and experience; and the consequent necessity of a revelation inferred. From that inference, without descending to a comparative view of such revelations, as have respectively urged their claim to divinity; which, with great judgment and erudition, hath, on the occasion that now engages my attention, been already done;*

* See White's Sermons.

I pro-

I proceeded to examine the merits of that revelation, which hath the moſt undoubted pretenſions to it: and, I truſt, ſatisfactorily evinced, that the revelation made to the Jews, though in the firſt period of its promulgation reſtricted to a ſingle nation, was deſtined in its iſſue to become univerſal: and even in the mean time, amidſt the viciſſitudes of that people, in their migrations from one country to another, whether in a ſtate of conqueſt or captivity, they left ſcattered remnants of the truths committed to them wherever they went. And hence have thoſe adumbrations of antient facts, which may be traced in prophane hiſtory, embelliſhed by poetic imagination, contributed not a little to the various ſyſtems of Heathen mythology. Even the expectation of a Meſſiah extended farther, than the religion of the Jews: towards the period of Chriſt's appearance in the world, the attention of the Heathen was in ſome degree excited to the advent of an illuſtrious cha-

SERMON VII.

racter,

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SERMON VII

racter, who ſhould form the world to happineſs; teaching them all things that it was expedient to know, and performing all that was neceſſary to be done, in order to promote univerſal bliſs, and effectuate the proſperity of mankind.

And as this general expectation of the Jews, declared by a ſeries of prophecy, ſupported the truth of that Meſſiah's appearance, when Chriſt came, and in that character profeſſed himſelf; no exertions have been ſpared, to invalidate the force of ſuch expectations. It hath been aſſerted, that it was very natural for people under oppreſſion to look forward, and flatter themſelves with the hopes of ſome great character; who ſhould riſe up among them, and break their ſervile yoke: — that the Jewiſh prieſts by their enigmatical oracular declarations cheriſhed thoſe expectations in the people, in order to quicken their exertions; — and that the Jews were a credulous, enthuſiaſtic people, always open

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open to the deceptions of the crafty priesthood. SERMON VII.

In my present discourse, therefore, I propose, 1st, to consider the general expectation of a Messiah, that prevailed amongst the Jews; and in this discussion to examine distinctly the objections to it, as already stated.

And to enquire, 2dly, whether their prophets represent him to have been a temporal prince and conqueror, or something greater.

I. The first of these points, it is obvious, regards those, who deny the truth of revelation; and who, to invalidate the doctrine of a promised Messiah, a doctrine on which the Christian religion rests, describe the Jews as a credulous, enthusiastic people, oppressed by their conquerors, impatient under their sufferings, and taught by former deliverances, often great and unexpected, *so much beyond*

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SERMON VII.

yond all that they hoped for, to look forward to ſome future Moſes, Joſhua, or Zerubbabel; the deliverer a fictitious character, and the doctrine a deluſion of prieſtcraft and impoſture.

If only when ſmarting under the oppreſſive arm of conqueſt, in their forlorn migrations, or in their various ſcenes of captivity, thoſe prophetic declarations of a future deliverer had been pronounced; there might have been ſome degree of pertinency in the reflection, that attributes them to deluſive expectations, derived from deſperation and diſtreſs. But in the moſt flouriſhing and proſperous ſtate of the nation, during their moſt brilliant periods of conqueſt and ſucceſs, regularly and uniformly did their prophets predict the advent of an illuſtrious perſon of their own nation; deſtined to *eſtabliſh a kingdom that ſhould endure for ever*. Even the moſt ſucceſsful and powerful princes themſelves, in the ſpirit of prophecy, declared the time would come;

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come; when under a powerful prince, whom the Lord would ſend to viſit Iſrael, *all nations ſhould be gathered under God*: that he would then *ſet up a kingdom, which ſhould never be deſtroyed*; *and all that ſhould ſee them*, when the kingdom of their Meſſiah ſhould be eſtabliſhed, *ſhall acknowledge them, that they are a ſeed bleſſed of the Lord.* In ſhort, the whole tenour of the Old Teſtament points out, and the great ſcope of it ſeems particularly directed to, that firſt and great purpoſe, the eſtabliſhment of a belief in one particular perſon, deſtined to *reign and proſper*; *and execute judgment and juſtice on the earth*: whoſe title, importing his high office, was to be, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS: who was to poſſeſs *dominion, and glory, and a kingdom*, ſo univerſal; that *all people, nations, and languages ſhould ſerve him.* His dominion is deſcribed as *an everlaſting dominion, which ſhould not paſs away*; *and his kingdom that, which ſhould not be deſtroyed.*

Nor

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SERMON VII.

Nor was this notion entirely confined to the Jews: Tacitus, in his account of that people, ſpeaks of it as an expectation entertained by many; but refers the foundation of it to certain doctrines contained in the ſcriptures of their prieſts. "Pluribus perſuaſio inerat, antiquis ſa-"cerdotum litteris contineri, eo ipſo "tempore fore, ut valeſceret Oriens, "profectique Judæa rerum potirentur: "quæ ambages Veſpaſianum et Titum "prædixerant." * †

Joſephus has the ſame obſervation: and imputes to the influence of ſuch prediction the vigorous exertions of the Jews, in the courſe of that fatal war, which ended in the deſolation of their city. "Το δε επαραν αυτες μαλιστα προς τον

* Tacitus Hiſt. lib. v.

† A general perſuaſion prevailed, that in the ancient ſcriptures of their prieſts it was declared; the power of the Eaſt ſhould be eſtabliſhed, and from Judæa thoſe ſhould proceed, who would obtain the ſovereignty of the world: which myſterious prediction was fulfilled in Veſpaſian and Titus.

"πολεμον,

"πολεμον, ην χρισμος αμφιβολος ομοιως εν τοις "ιεροις ευρημενος γραμμασιν, ως κατα τον καιρον "εκεινον, απο της χωρας τις αυτων αρξει της οικου-"μενης. Τουτο οι μεν ως οικειον εξελαβον, και πολ-"λοι των σωφων επλανηθησαν περι την κρισιν. "Εδηλε δ'αμα την περι Ουεσπασιανε το λογιον ηγε-"μονιαν, αποδειχθεντος επι Ιουδειας αυτοκρα-"τορος." * †

Cicero, in a letter to Lentulus, alludes to a Sibylline oracle, purporting the ſame event; which he applies to Ptolomy. "Cum eam [nempe Alexandriam] "pace præſidiiſque firmaris, Ptolomæus "redeat in regnum; ita fore, ut per te

* Joſeph. lib. vi. cap. xxxi.

† But what chiefly excited their exertions, and ſupported their perſeverance in the war, was an equivocal oracle, which appears to have been found in their antient ſcriptures; purporting, that about that time ſome one from that country ſhould ſway the ſceptre of the world, And the perſon, ſo deſigned, they underſtood to be one of their own nation: a circumſtance, in which many of their moſt learned were deceived. For it is very clear, that the prediction referred to the ſovereignty of Judæa poſſeſſed by Veſpaſian.

"reſti-

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SERMON VII.

" reſtituatur, quemadmodum ſenatus
" initio cenſuit : et ſine multitudine re-
" ducatur, quemadmodum homines re-
" ligioſi Sibyllæ placere dixerunt." * †

Nor will the pretended character of the Jews, as being a credulous and enthuſiaſtic people, add any weight to the preceding objection ; founded on the feelings of deſperation and diſtreſs. Enthuſiaſm and credulity might have prompted them to take up arms, and liſt under the banner of every adventurous chief, who ſhould have ambition or addreſs ſufficient to ſet himſelf up for that *Son of Promiſe*. It is the nature of enthuſiaſm and credulity, to prompt to raſh and daring enterpriſes. They allow no

* Cic. lib. 1. Epiſt ad Lent.

† When you have effected the peace ſtabliſhment of Alexandria, and properly garriſoned it. Let Ptolomy return to his kingdom : ſo will he appear to be reſtored by you, as the ſenate at firſt determined ; and ſo be brought back without tumult or violence, as religious men have ſuppoſed the Sibyl predicted.

time

time to reaſon and reflect: they warm the heart with a ſort of hallowed fire; that impetuouſly preſſes forward with a power ſuperiour to the love of glory, and vanquiſhes doubt by a principle more efficacious than the dread of ſhame. Actuated only by the goad of deſperation, and the influence of enthuſiaſm and credulity, the Jews would not ſo paſſively have borne their hopes and expectations for ſo many ages, as they were known to have done: their prophets in a long ſucceſſion continuing to promiſe them a Meſſiah, and they in full conviction of the truth of ſuch promiſes patiently continuing age after age to expect him. SERMON VII.

Nor do the accounts, with which the annals of that people furniſh us, of a banditti of profligate and diſorderly men, aſſembled under the conduct of this or that deſperate chief, who might boaſt himſelf of conſequence, and aſſume the character of a deliverer, affect the truth of

SERMON VII.

of the above remark. No ſtate is free from partial inſurrections of men ruined and deſperate; who frame grievances, and oppoſe order, for the ſake of rapine and plunder. Thoſe riotous mobs do not invalidate the argument, againſt the imputation of enthuſiaſm, credulity, and deſperation; founded on the quiet, paſſive, general expectation of a Meſſiah: by their prophets deſcribed in characters very different from thoſe, which mark the ruffian leaders, that in the Jewiſh, as well as every other ſtate, may have occaſionally drawn together a rabble for purpoſes ſuch as theſe. Or, if independent of every motive of licentiouſneſs and rapine, the bare pretence of Meſſiahſhip had power and influence enough to draw together a company of men, ready at the hazard of their lives to ſupport ſuch an expectation; the effect evinces the ſtrong and efficacious perſuaſion of the real advent of a promiſed Meſſiah.

And

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And as to the pretence of ſuch promiſes having been the forgery of their prieſts, calculated to call forth the exertions of the people under any enterpriſing chief that might occaſionally ariſe, of courage to attempt, and conduct to execute, a plan of deliverance from captivity or bondage, and eſtabliſh once more their kingdom by conqueſt; thoſe prophecies, to afford any ground for the ſuppoſition, muſt have been confined to the day of tribulation: which has been already obſerved not to be the caſe. Their prieſts alſo in the commiſſion of ſuch acts of forgery, their prieſts muſt have been wretched politicians; a reflection this, which does not appear founded in exact truth; and their chiefs and civil officers very negligent and remiſs, in ſuffering ſuch incentives to anarchy and confuſion to be propoſed to the people. We muſt therefore conclude, that the predictions in the old teſtament of a Meſſiah, the prophecies of kings and princes, declared in times of proſperity, as well as in periods of diſtreſs, regular-

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SERMON VII.

ly continued in a courſe of near two thouſand years, were not the forgeries of prieſts: and, that the people's belief in them, was not the effect of enthuſiaſm and credulity, but a rational aſſent; an aſſent, which neither the varying circumſtance of affluence or penury could alter, the falſe pretenſions of perſons, who had at different times aſſumed that character, could remove, nor diſappointment of any kind induce them to relinquiſh. For what is it, that could effect this, but a rational ground of belief; what is it, that could render ſuch a notion ſo efficacious and univerſal, but the genuine ſtamp of divinity and truth?

If however we be to have it eternally in our ears, that the Jews are an enthuſiaſtic and credulous people: without alluſion to the conſequences, let us freely examine the objection itſelf; and it will be found to a degree futile and abſurd. An individual or two may be credulous and enthuſiaſtic. A whole family, through

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through ſome ſucceſſions, held in ignorance, and biaſſed by the early prejudice of parental example, may poſſeſs minds ſtrongly tinctured with enthuſiaſm and credulity. It ſhall even be allowed that a whole nation, while they continue immerſed in barbariſm, and involved in ignorance, may from thoſe circumſtances derive an enthuſiaſtic zeal and bigotry in ſupport of falſe tenets, which they may have credulouſly adopted. But that nature ſhould as it were have moulded the minds of a whole nation with a peculiar diſpoſition to believe abſurd, and fancy vain, things; a nation, who have lived, at various periods, among the moſt poliſhed and ſcientific people of the world; who among themſelves have boaſted many characters eminent for their great erudition; who have with freedom canvaſſed, and with abilities inveſtigated, the volume, that contains their own religion; have, in their admiſſion of the contents of that volume, diſcriminated truth from falſhood, facts from pretences, records of authenticity

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SERMON VII.

from doubtful relations; and, what may weigh moſt with the characters, to whom theſe reflections are particularly addreſſed, a liberal-minded people, who had their free-thinkers, as well as we: that credulity and enthuſiaſm ſhould be the conſtitutional characteriſtics of ſuch a people, is a paradox, which ſober reaſon can never explain. But any thing it ſeems is to be admitted, rather than a doctrine tending to ſupport the credibility of a religion, whoſe univerſality levels the diſtinction of illiterate and wiſe; whoſe large pale, exalting virtue wherever found, comprehends every good heart, and willing mind: humiliating to philoſophic pride; and at the ſame time ſo inconſiſtent with the purſuits of the voluptuous, that they muſt either renounce their pleaſures, or give up all the advantages their religion propoſes.

Having thus endeavoured to obviate the objections, that have been advanced againſt the doctrine of a promiſed Meſſiah;

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ſiah; it would be a vain intruſion on your time, farther to particulariſe the ſcriptural predictions importing ſuch a promiſe, or more at large to inſiſt on proofs of the univerſal credit, the Jews themſelves gave to the doctrine; looking forwards to the deſtined period with animated hopes. It is a doctrine by their prophets ſo plainly revealed, and ſo earneſtly enforced; that if, deaf to the voice of prophecy, blind to the appeal of miracles, without one good reaſon for ſo perverſe a conduct, the Jews had rejected it; deſervedly would they have incurred the reproach of the moſt invincible ſtupidity, that ever marked a devoted people. It was uninterruptedly inculcated by all their prophets, down from Moſes to Malachi: who uniformly predicted a particular kingdom, that God would erect, which ſhould never be deſtroyed; and a particular perſon, whoſe dominion was to be an everlaſting dominion. ONE particular king, and not a race of kings, is throughout the

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SERMON VII.

whole line of prophecy designed. The Jews understood it so; and from such interpretation of the predictions concluded, that the Messiah should never die. Accordingly when our Saviour gave intimation of his death: the Jews immediately replied, *we have heard out of the law, that Christ abideth for ever; how sayest thou then, that the son of man must be lifted up?* And when he talked to his disciples of his death and sufferings; Peter could not bear a reflection that so shocked his hopes, and answered, *that be far from thee, Lord.*

And after prophecy was silent; that is, from the time of Malachi to the advent of our Lord, the expectation of Israel did not cease. Indeed, as the time destined for the completion of this important prophecy approached; the hope of the promise became more and more lively. Some of the heathen oracles caught the ray of illumination: and about the time, that our Saviour visited the

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the world, the expected appearance of a great and powerful prince became ſo common; that it was applied, as hath been already intimated, to ſeveral heathen princes. And from that ſo general and prevalent expectation, ſome have attacked the doctrine on the ground of its novelty: as a notion, which firſt obtained credit about the time of Herod. SERMON VII.

But, ſays Voſſius, we muſt go farther back for it: ſo far as the time, when Pompey made himſelf maſter of Jeruſalem: fifty nine years before Chriſt, and exactly on the completion of Daniel's ſixty ſecond week.* Suetonius ſpeaks of a prediction, previous to the birth of Auguſtus; "Regem Populo Romano "naturam parturire." † And Cicero alludes to the ſame oracle, as well in the epiſtle to Lentulus cited above, as in the following paſſage in his treatiſe on

* Voſſius de ſibyllinis oraculis lib. iv.

† That nature was in labour of a king deſtined to rule the Romans.

SERMON VII.

divination. * "Sibyllæ verſus obſerva-
"mus, quos illa furens fudiſſe dicitur.
"Quorum interpres nuper falſa quædam
"hominum fama dicturus in Senatu
"putabatur: cum, quem revera regem
"habebamus, appellandum quoque eſſe
"regem, ſi ſalvi eſſe vellemus." † This oracle was applied to Julius Cæſar: on which interpretation Cicero, glowing with the flame of patriotiſm, proceeds; "Cum antiſtitibus agamus, et quidvis
"potius ex illis libris, quam regem
"proferant: quem Romæ poſthæc nec
"dii, nec homines eſſe patientur." ‡ After the death of Cæſar, this illuſtrious

* Lic. de divinitatione lib. ii.

† Obſerve the verſes of the Sibyl, which the frantic prieſteſs is ſaid to have dictated: whoſe interpreter was thought to have drawn from thence in the ſenate falſe concluſions; ſuggeſting, that he, whom we in reality admitted as king, muſt be acknowledged and ſtiled as king, if we wiſh to be ſaved.

‡ But might I exchange a word with the prieſts, I would recommend it to them, rather to produce any thing from their books, than a king: whom neither Gods or men will ever ſuffer hereafter to exiſt in Rome.

prophecy

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prophecy was applied to Auguſtus: Virgil compliments his friend and patron Pollio with the application of it to his infant ſon: and others again ſubſcribed to the groſs adulation of Joſephus; who condeſcended to betray the high privileges of his nation, and applied the promiſe to Veſpaſian. Many extracts might be made from the Sibylline books, alluding to different circumſtances attending that promiſed event; but I will content myſelf with producing the ſingle one, adverted to by the authors, whom I have cited above.

Αυταρ επει Ρωμη τε και Αιγυπτε Βασιλεια
Εις εν δίθυνσα, τοτε δη Βασιλεια μεγιση
Αθανατε Βασιληος επ' ανθρωποισι φανειται.
Ηξει δ' αγνος αναξ ωασης γης σκηπτρα κρατησων
Εις αιωνας παντας επειγομενοιο χρονοιο.
Και τοτε Λατινων απαραιτητος χολος ανδρων,
Τρεις Ρωμην οικτρη μοιρη καταδηλησονται. *

From

* Orac. Sibyl. lib. ii.
But after Rome and Egypt ſhall unite
Their

SERMON VII.

From what has been above obſerved, it is beyond contradiction evident; that the doctrine of a promiſed Meſſiah is not only aſſerted in the ſcriptures of the Old Teſtament, but by heathen oracles declared; not only believed by the Jews, but admitted and adverted to by profane authors, of the firſt rank, and the moſt poliſhed ages. Let us then proceed to the ſecond article of enquiry: which was, whether the prophets repreſent the Meſſiah as a temporal prince and conqueror, or ſomething greater.

II. In ſuppoſing the Meſſiah to appear in the character of a powerful and triumphant prince, who ſhould eſtabliſh the kingdom of Iſrael on ſo ſure and

Their powers, and an extended empire riſe;
A prince immortal ſhall the ſceptre ſway:
A king immaculate; whoſe realms no line
Shall circumſcribe, his reign no point of time.
Inexorable then the rage of Rome:
And under three the power of Rome ſhall fall.

ſolid

ſolid a foundation, that it ſhould through all ages continue miſtreſs of the world, and that all nations ſhould finally ſubmit to it; the Jews had one great difficulty to encounter: and this was the ſtate of humiliation, in which ſome prophecies repreſented him. An oppreſſed and deſpiſed Saviour, ſuffering inſults, and neither in word or act vindictively retaliating, diſplaying not the indignant ſpirit of an earthly conqueror, but an exemplar of meekneſs, patience, and humility, was little calculated to aſſume the port of worldly grandeur; and, by the workings of a bold and daring mind, to keep a profligate world in awe: it confounded their expectations, and croſſed the proud and towering hopes, they had entertained of him.

A State of ſuch deſcription as this did by no means comport even with the flattering ideas, his own diſciples at firſt formed of his future greatneſs. Depreſſed and diſpirited at his crucifixion, they

SERMON VII.

they gave up every thing for loſt: and mourned their diſappointed hopes in their crucified maſter; whom they then deplored, that they had vainly *thought to have been him, who ſhould have redeemed Iſrael.* But this erroneous opinion we find ſoon corrected: for after he had *explained to them the ſcriptures concerning himſelf*; they, who on his apprehenſion had denied, and on his crucifixion had loſt all hopes in him, after his reſurrection and their frequent converſations with him, ſtood boldly forth in his defence: publickly arraigned the Jews for their impiety in having murthered an innocent perſon, and Him their own Meſſiah, the Lord of life; and gloried in ſuffering ignominy and ſtripes for his ſake. So clearly did thoſe ſcriptures, properly underſtood, point out a ſuffering Saviour.

This ſuffering ſtate of the Meſſiah, deſcribed in terms ſo explicit, as ſome thought could not be denied, and ſo glaringly

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glaringly contradicting the idea of that glorious ſtate, in which all expected their Meſſiah to appear, raiſed a difficulty; which to obviate, two methods have by the later Jews been deviſed: one explaining it away, and the other denying the application of it. SERMON VII.

1. Firſt, in evaſion of thoſe prophecies, ſo injurious as the Jews conceived them to the dignity of their Saviour and Deliverer; the doctrine of the ſuppoſed advent of two different Meſſiahs was adopted: the one an afflicted, ſuffering Meſſiah, deſtined to teach them patience and reſignation; and the other a great and glorious prince, ſent to reward them for their ſufferings. But this notion has not the leaſt foundation in the ſcriptures: where the Meſſiah is conſtantly, uniformly, and clearly repreſented, as the one Redeemer, *the Holy One of Iſrael*: *the Lord ſaid unto my Lord, thou art a prieſt for ever*: and the like. It is a futile and vain conceit, without any authority

SERMON VII.

thority from their moſt antient and genuine writings to ſupport it. And they may with equal pretence admit a number of Meſſiahs, as two; Elijah, Jeremiah, and every afflicted ſuffering prophet, that was ſent to them. *

2. The other mode of interpretation denies the application of thoſe deſcriptions to the Meſſiah: referring them to their nation at large, as figurative repreſentations of it in its ſeveral periods of captivity and oppreſſion. But if the predictions of the glorious appearance of the Meſſiah be taken in a literal ſenſe; we have the ſame ground for applying a literal meaning to thoſe prophecies, that deſcribe his humiliation.

* Vid. Pocoek Appen. ad. Comm. in Malachi: Ch. iii. V. 1. Ecce ego mitto angelum meum, et præparabit viam meam, et ſtatim veniet ad templum ſuum Dominus, quem vos quæritis, et Angelus Fœderis, quem vos vultis; ecce venit, dicit Dominus Exercituum.

Who

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Who of the Jews, antient or modern, ever doubted of the following repreſentations being deſcriptive of the Meſſiah? SERMON VII.

"Unto us a child is born, unto us a ſon "is given: and the government ſhall "be upon his ſhoulders; and his name "ſhall be called Wonderful, Counſel- "lor, the Mighty God, the Father "of the everlaſting Age, the Prince of "Peace: of the increaſe of his govern- "ment and peace there ſhall be no end, "upon the throne of David, and upon "his kingdom to fix it, and to eſtabliſh "it, with judgment, and with juſtice, "henceforth and for ever." Again: "The ſpirit of the Lord ſhall reſt upon "him, the ſpirit of wiſdom and under- "ſtanding, the ſpirit of counſel and "ſtrength; the ſpirit of the knowledge "and fear of Jehovah: and he ſhall be "of quick diſcernment in the fear of "Jehovah, ſo that not according to the "ſight of his eyes ſhall he judge, nor "according to the hearing of his ears "ſhall he reprove; but with righteouſ-

"neſs

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SERMON VII.

" neſs ſhall he judge the poor, and with " equity ſhall he work conviction on " the meek of the earth. He ſhall " ſmite the earth with the blaſt of his " mouth, and with the breath of his " lips ſhall he ſlay the wicked." Is there any one, that affixes to thoſe deſcriptions of Iſaiah a figurative meaning? Certainly not: and for this juſt reaſon; becauſe the literal ſenſe is plain and obvious, admitting no doubt, and involving no difficulty. There is nothing forced, or ſtrained, or inconſiſtent in the literal meaning; and therefore every rule of ſound criticiſm witholds us from flying to a figurative interpretation.

If by the ſame rule of criticiſm we judge the ſame prophet's repreſentation of the humiliated ſtate of the Meſſiah; we ſhall find it characſtered in as ſtrong lines in the 53d chapter of Iſaiah, as his exalted ſtate has been noted in the paſſages above adduced. Indeed this deſcription, taken in a literal ſenſe, is not only

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only plain throughout, and uniformly perſpicuous: but in affixing a figurative meaning to it, and applying it to the Jewiſh nation, there are parts of it, ſuch as refer to the atonement of the Meſſiah; which are perfectly, irreconcileable with every accommodation of common ſenſe. For inſtance: "ſurely our infirmities "hath he borne; and our ſorrows, he "hath carried them: yet we thought "him judicially ſtricken, ſmitten of "God, and afflicted. But he was "wounded for our tranſgreſſions: he "was ſmitten for our iniquities. The "chaſtiſement, by which our peace is "effected, was laid upon him; and by "his bruiſes we are healed." Take this paſſage figuratively: and I conceive it will be very difficult to prove the connection, the neceſſary connection between the ſuffering ſtate of the Jewiſh nation at one period, and its eaſy, peaceful, happy ſtate at another; or by what nice and ſecret train of cauſes and effects

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SERMON VII.

this depended on, and was effected by, the other.

What concluſion then do theſe reflections produce? Clearly this. That the abſurd device of the later Jews to obviate the predictions of the humiliated ſtate of the Meſſiah, by the admiſſion of two Meſſiahs, tends to eſtabliſh the belief of a ſuffering Meſſiah. And with regard to the other opinion of ſuch deſcriptions as figurative of the Jewiſh nation; the letter is ſo irreconcileable with the figure, as to deſtroy every attempt at accommodation. And the inference from thence muſt be; that, thoſe prophetic deſcriptions of the Meſſiah being in both inſtances literal, in him muſt meet the abaſement of a meek, humble, oppreſſed, perſecuted perſon, and the auguſt glories of a prince, whoſe government and kingdom ſhall laſt for ever.

Full as the Jews were of the idea of a Saviour and Deliverer, a powerful and puiſſant

puiſſant prince, who ſhould obtain for them univerſal empire; we are not ſurpriſed to find them endeavouring by every means, determined by any forced and foreign conſtruction, to get rid of the doctrine of a ſuffering Meſſiah. But we have alſo ſeen, that the very ſame arguments, which prove his glorious and exalted ſtate, are equally ſtrong in evincing his humiliation. And obſtinate as they have been in rejecting the declarations of their own prophets reſpecting the one; we will next enquire, whether their notions reſpecting the other be more conſonant with their ſcriptures. Their opinion is briefly this: "that an illuſtrious prince ſhould riſe "up among them, and by force of "arms eſtabliſh his kingdom: that "under his auſpices they ſhould tri-"umph over their enemies, and that "even to the lateſt period of time Jeruſa-"lem ſhould give law to all the world." With this opinion I proceed to confront ſome of thoſe prophecies, which are

SERMON VII.

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SERMON VII.

unanimously considered as descriptive of the state and character of a glorious and exalted Messiah.

And first, had they well considered the whole scope of the prophecies relating to the kingdom of the Messiah; they would have been convinced that a spiritual, and not a temporal, kingdom was pourtrayed. *Righteousness and equity*, according to the prophecies already cited, are the constant marks of it; and not conquests characterized in blood: *with judgment and justice* it was to be supported; and not by the oppressive arm of strength: by *the knowledge and fear of Jehovah* it was to be maintained, and not by the rod of earthly power. *I the Lord*, saith Isaiah, *have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee; and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles, to open the blind eyes, and bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them, who sit in darkness, out of their prison house.* His office

office is here plainly described to consist in the dissemination of true knowledge: he is marked out, or *called forth*, as it is expressed, not by exploits of conquest, but as an exemplar of righteousness; his destination is, not to controul the world with the authority of a chief and conquerer, but to disseminate heavenly knowledge even among the Gentiles; and by the illumination of the spirit to open the understanding of the blind, and release them from the prison house of ignorance and sin. And how compleatly he should be qualified for these high offices another prophecy declares: *There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his root; and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and piety, and the fear of the Lord.*

SERMON VII.

The text, I have next to produce, seems particularly addressed to their pre-

SERMON VII.

judiced opinion of a temporal prince and mighty conquerour. *He ſhall not cry*, or more properly, *ſhout*, which the original word יצעק in this place ſignifies, and under it the ſhout of war is alluded to, *nor lift up, nor cauſe his voice to be heard in the ſtreets: a bruiſed reed ſhall he not break, nor quench the ſmoaking flax; but he ſhall bring forth judgment unto truth: he ſhall not be cruſhed, nor diſcouraged, till he hath ſet judgment in the earth, and the Gentiles ſhall* BELIEVE IN HIS NAME. This prophecy is not only deſcriptive of what the Meſſiah ſhould be, but declarative of what he ſhould not be. It declares that his appearance ſhall not be in the character of a warrior; an invader of territories, to which he has no right, and a ſtormer of peaceful cities: but that ſo inoffenſive ſhould he appear, ſo far from exertions of power, ſo far from leading war and deſtruction in his train; that he ſhould not even break a bruiſed reed, ſhould exerciſe no act of violence, nor carry deſolation into the moſt impotent ſtate; implied under the figure of extinguiſhing

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guiſhing the feeble light of an expiring lamp. The object of atchievement, to which he was deſtined, was not to render the Gentiles tributary to Jeruſalem, but to bring the Gentiles into a common hope in Jeruſalem's Meſſiah; to conciliate a BELIEF in his name, a truſt and confidence in the divinity of his miſſion. SERMON VII.

If we examine the 45th pſalm, which the Jewiſh doctors unanimouſly acknowledged to be prophetic of the Meſſiah, notwithſtanding the figures of worldly majeſty under which he is deſcribed, it is plainly declared that He ſhall proſper and reign BECAUSE *of his truth, and meekneſs, and righteouſneſs*; *that his throne ſhould be for ever and ever*: and, as a characteriſtic of his kingdom, that *the ſceptre of it ſhould be a ſceptre of* RIGHTEOUSNESS. The 110th pſalm has the ſame general evidence of the learned Jews, in proof of its reference to the Meſſiah. He is there repreſented, as an everlaſting high prieſt; a term ſignificant of his holineſs;

SERMON VII.

holiness: and termed by David, *his Lord*; who should sit at the right hand of God, there to contemplate the subjugation of his enemies. Doth this description comport with the character of an earthly conqueror? And doth it not comport with that of a heavenly delegate? And as the nature of heavenly greatness is indescribable by an earthly pen, it was natural to cloath it under images of mortal glory. And what scene of earthly glory equals that of triumphant power and conquest? *The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath: He shall fill the places with the dead bodies: He shall wound the heads over many countries.*

Let us next examine the prophecy of Nathan; the former part of which directly points to Solomon: *he shall build me a house, and I will establish his throne for ever.* The prophet then, in the spirit

rit of divination, instead of dwelling on his subject, rapt with divine enthusiasm at the prospect presented to his mind, directs his prediction to the endless duration of that kingdom under the Messiah: declaring that God *would be His father, and He should be His son: that He would settle him in his house and in his kingdom for ever.* Good kings, and prophets, God sometimes denominates his servants. So was Moses stiled, and David. But no one, except Christ, was ever stiled in an especial and particular manner His son. The term FATHER, had it stood alone, might perhaps have by some been supposed to denote the tenderness and affection, which God promised to shew him: but the antithetic term SON discovers a more marked and restricted meaning. It was too distinguishing a title, to be conferred on a mere human prince and governor. It was never applied to either of the characters noticed above; and could with much less propriety be ascribed to an inferior one, as was Solo-

SERMON VII.

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SERMON VII.

mon: inferior in piety, in zeal for God, and concern for his people. Moſes was a prince and leader, and David a king: both of them delegated by God for high purpoſes, and both of them prophets. Yet thus diſtinguiſhed, they were never ſtiled the ſons of God. SON OF GOD, was the reſerved appellation of a ſuperior character: but what character could be ſuperior to both theſe, but ſomething ſupra-human or divine? That other expreſſion, *I will ſettle him* IN MY HOUSE, ſeems to bear an alluſion to that particular holineſs of character, which ſhould diſtinguiſh the Meſſiah; and which, in the preceding quotation, was noted by the office of an everlaſting prieſthood.

Behold, ſaith Iſaiah, the prophet from whom I have extracted moſt of the preceding quotations, and whoſe predictions, though confeſſedly delivered ſeven or eight hundred years before the appearance of Chriſt, are more like a hiſtory

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tory of his life, than a prophecy; *behold, a king ſhall reign in righteouſneſs, and princes*, that is princes under him, his miniſters, *ſhall rule in judgment.* Jeremiah in ſtill ſtronger colours characteriſes the Meſſiah: *and this is his name, ſaith he, whereby he ſhall be called*, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. The word is, Jehovah our righteouſneſs: He, in whoſe exalted merits ſhall be our righteouſneſs; He, in whom we look for ſalvation: a ſalvation not placed in his conqueſts, in his military proweſs and exploits of valour, but in his righteouſneſs, holineſs, equity, in all thoſe virtues calculated to raiſe the mind, and fit it for univerſal bliſs and endleſs happineſs. SERMON VII.

And is this the character, deſtined by a ſeries of martial exploits to obtain the ſovereignty of the world; and by His proweſs hold that ſubject world in awe? Are thoſe the means calculated to eſtabliſh an univerſal monachy; and to cruſh the vigorous exertions of rival and contending

SERMON VIII.

tending powers? Let the nation of Israel queſtion itſelf; whether holineſs, righteouſneſs, equity, and judgment, were the means, by which it eſtabliſhed even its narrow dominion in Paleſtine. Aſk them whether they did not wade through blood, through havock, and deſtation, to that eſtabliſhment; which they effected, under their puiſſant heaven-favoured chiefs and princes, Moſes, Joſhua, David, and others. The object, the important object, we acknowledge, juſtified every ſtep they took: an object of all that can concern mankind, the greateſt: the conſervation of the knowledge of God; and, from thence derived, a ſenſe of the love we owe Him, of the reverence with which we ought to regard Him, of the ſervice we are bound to pay Him.

Let them diſpaſſionately ſearch their own ſcriptures, and enquire whether they do not uniformly repreſent the dominion of the Meſſiah, as founded, and

conſiſting

consisting in righteousness: whether they do not character His glory, in a title superior to that of earthly grandeur; His *kingdom, as not of this world.* It may indeed appear strange, that those, who should seem most interested in what their prophets had declared, and whom one might conceive possessed of the greatest helps to understand them; that those, to whom the glad tidings were first sent, should stop their ears against them. But giving something to prejudice, and much to self-interest, for they had learned to expect present honour and advantage, we may in some measure account for that obstinacy; which shut up their hearts against every impression of truth. And when we hear their own prophets, in words inspired by God himself, declaring; *hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not: the heart of this people is fat, and their ears heavy, and they shut their eyes; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts,*

SERMON VIII.

and

SERMON VII.

and convert and be healed: the effect is explained; and their predicted miſtake of the Meſſiah affords an additional argument to us, of the truth of His miſſion: which ſo pointedly meets the deſcription of their prophets; and with the added particular of their own rejection of Him.

From the preceding reflections I will offer only one ſhort inference, the inference of the great Apoſtle to the Gentiles, drawn from ſimilar reaſoning: *wherefore if God ſpared not the natural branches, take heed leſt He ſpare not thee.* If the Jews, with eyes ſo blinded, and hearts hardened againſt the voice of truth, victims to invincible obſtinacy, and inveterate prejudices, experienced ſuch a ſeries of evils, as in no other national inſtance ever marked a devoted people: let us profit by their example; and not by a ſimilar conduct draw down upon ourſelves ſimilar, or greater, evils: let us not, through love of pleaſure and diſſipation,

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pation, neglect to know and to understand the sacred records of our religion; nor through vanity, and the little catchings at admiration, by daring to do, what really wise, and truly good men, would not do, affect to treat them with scorn. Let not the contemptuous air of irony and ridicule, nor any other motive whatever, divert us from studying, and from professing to study those volumes; on which a Newton, a Locke, and a Boyle were not ashamed to employ their great abilities, and valuable time. If any learning be worth pursuing; it is that, on which the interests of another world depend. *Search the scriptures; for in them are the words of eternal life.* And the farther we search them, of this truth we shall be the more convinced; and conviction will add new incitement to our labours: and the more we study, and the better we understand, the more we shall learn to value, them.

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SERMON VIII.

Matt. xxii. 42.

What think ye of Chriſt?

SERMON VIII.

UNDER this general ſubject, the queſtions diſcuſſed in my laſt diſcourſe were, firſt whether the general expectation of a Meſſiah was founded in reaſon and truth: and ſecondly, whether that Son of Promiſe, deſtined to viſit and redeem Iſrael, was to be a mere mortal, an illuſtrious prince and conquerour, or ſomething greater; of nature ſupra-human, and divine. And in this latter inveſtigation I referred to the prophecies of the old Teſtament; which the Jews were found moſt wretchedly to have miſtaken, and miſrepreſented: and, in conſequence

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consequence of such misinterpretations, to have rejected a saviour, and with silly expectation looked forward to a conqueror. Misjudging nation! Was it for this, that Jehovah led you forth from the land of affliction; and by a train of splendid miracles conducted you through the pathless sea, and waste wilderness, to your promised inheritance? Was it for this the light of prophecy shone forth; beaming blessings on mankind, and proclaiming a new æra of happiness to the world? Had those prophecies no farther aspect, than to conquest and extended dominion; to private ambition and public injury? Wretched politicians! Or ye would have known; a warlike prince, such as your narrow prejudices figured your Messiah, though conquest like a slave seem chained to his triumphal car, is the greatest scourge an oppressed nation can experience. Did increased extent of public territory ever produce an increase of private happiness: or is it not notoriously otherwise? Be that as it

SERMON VIII.

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SERMON VIII.

may; the Jews in general entertained no other idea of their Meſſiah, than that which worldly ſplendor ſuggeſted; the range of greatneſs and power.

And there is a ſect of Chriſtians alſo, that hold doctrines much the ſame; if indeed thoſe are to be called Chriſtians, who regard Chriſt with ſcarcely more reverence, than even the Mahometans themſelves; who deny to him every character of divinity, and every degree of diſtinction, above Peter, James, and the reſt of his followers, except that of maſter and diſciple. "It is evident, 'ſay they,' that the Jews themſelves "expected nothing more than a mere "man for their Meſſiah." And then is commonly cited in proof of it this prophecy of Moſes: *a prophet ſhall the Lord your God raiſe up unto you from among your brethren,* LIKE UNTO ME. And this likeneſs they conclude to conſiſt in dignity of character, rank, and nature: whereas the expreſſion alludes to the

the office only; and the true and literal translation of the original is, "a prophet not like unto me, but as I am *οἷος ἐμοί*, one who shall sustain the prophetic office, as I do, *shall the Lord God raise up unto you, from among your brethren.* And if instead of a loose translation, the original had been consulted; it would have precluded such ground of Socinian cavil. SERMON VIII.

With regard to the general assertion, that "the Jews expected nothing more than a mere man for their Messiah;" it is very readily acknowledged: and the conclusion follows; that as they were charged by their own prophets, with having mistaken the scriptures; and that charge was renewed against them by our Saviour; their opinion is no proof of the truth of the doctrine they entertained. On the other hand,

* See Priestley on the Influence of Philosophy on Christianity, p. 310.

SERMON VIII.

if it appear from the ſcriptures of the new Teſtament, that Chriſt is there repreſented as ſomething more than mere man; the contrary opinion of the Jews tends to confirm the apparent doctrine of the new Teſtament, and to fulfil the prophecies of the old. To this inveſtigation, then let us now proceed, and enquire into the nature and character of Meſſiah the Chriſt, as the ſcriptures of the new Teſtament repreſent him; with one previous obſervation: which is, that ſome line is to be drawn, according to which we muſt admit, or reject, figurative conſtructions. And the proper rule of admittance I conceive to be, when the literal one implies a contradiction to reaſon; or to other clear, direct, and poſitive texts of ſcripture. For if, as fancy prevails, figurative meanings be arbitrarily aſſigned; the doctrines of the new Teſtament could not be conſidered as a general rule of faith or practice: but muſt be liable, as whim and imagi-

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nation led by every fanciful reader to be frittered away. SERMON VIII.

The method I propose in the sequel to pursue, is; first, to enquire what is the general scope and tenor, which the scriptures of the new Testament, on the subject of our present investigation purport and propose: and secondly, to meet the objections to Christ's pre-existence and divinity, in the full force in which certain readers of a revived sect have pressed them.

I. To begin with the birth of Christ, which the histories of the Evangelists, Matthew and Luke, declare to have been in an eminent manner supernatural, we find him introduced into the world without a human father; and therein charactered with a plain mark of individuation, which discriminates him from all other men, and places him above the rank of human beings. *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the*

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SERMON VIII.

highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing, διο και το γενωμενον αγιον, not βρεφος, not that holy infant, child, or son; but that holy thing, or being, *which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God.* Derived from a source thus divine, the production must necessarily partake of its divine origin: he was accordingly *called*, that is, he *was*, in a peculiar manner was, *the Son of God.* Look through nature, and observe if we have not as plain and powerful an argument in support of this doctrine, as analogy can afford. The Evangelist John also, in his account of the origin of Christ, as plainly as words can express a meaning, asserts his divinity, and also his pre-existence: declaring that he *was with God in the beginning*; and that by his instrumentality all things were made. This could not be affirmed of a mere man; and that this procemium of St. John's Gospel did refer to Christ, it

it would lead me too far from my preſent ſubject to go about to prove.* SERMON VIII.

Agreeable to ſuch divine origin is the next account we have of him, when the Holy Ghoſt in a bodily form deſcended on him; and a voice from Heaven pronounced him to be the *beloved Son of God.* And uniformly and conſiſtently with the cœleſtial declaration, when there is occaſion to ſpecify his nature, and teſtify who he really is, he both ſtiles himſelf, and is acknowledged by his diſciples as, THE SON OF GOD. The condition addreſſed to the Ethiopian eunuch, previous to his baptiſm, was, *if thou believeſt.* His anſwer evinces the extent of the implied queſtion: *I believe that Jeſus is the Son of God.*† Adam it is true was alſo ſtiled the Son of God:

* See "Free Examination of the Socinian Expoſition of the prefatory verſes of St. John's Goſpel." Printed for W. Flexney.

† See Sermon I.

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SERMON VIII.

because God was his immediate author. But Christ, notwithstanding Adam's priority in the flesh, is stiled δευτερος ανθρωπος. A distinction this not without a difference, and the difference is plain. Adam was created by God, a mere human creature; and, being produced without father or mother, was therefore stiled in the genealogical account of Christ, the Son of God. But the difference of Christ's procedure from God, is marked by the strong term τοκος, begotten: a term plainly expressive of a communication of nature.

In the account of the transaction at the wedding at Cana, there is in the answer of our Lord to his mother something very declarative of a superiority of nature, above what appearances might challenge. *Woman*, not mother; *what concern have you with me?* What influence do you claim over me: to what dependence on you am I subject? And much to the same purpose we find him continually

continually expreſſing himſelf, on any claims of earthly kindred. When, arguing with the doctors in the ſynagogue, it was told him; that his *mother and brethren ſtood without, deſiring to ſpeak with him*, he anſwered, *who is my mother; and who are my brethren? And ſtretching forth his hands to his diſciples, he ſaid; behold my mother, and my brethren!* The paſſage, connected with other reflections, that had at different times occaſionally dropped from him, may in ſome ſuch terms as the following be paraphraſed. "Whatever appearances may ſpeak me "earthly connections have I none. I "am a ſtranger in this world; without "a home, or reſidence in it, where I "may lay my head; without one na- "tural relative, to engage me with the "tender tie of affection; without "other buſineſs here, than that which "I received in commiſſion from above." Thus alſo on his mother's expoſtulation with him on another occaſion; *thy father and I have ſought thee ſorrowing:* his

SERMON VIII.

anſwer

SERMON VIII.

answer is similar and uniform. *Why is it, that ye sought me?* And then, indirectly declaring Joseph not to be his father, he adds; *have ye not known*, are ye yet to learn, *that I must be about* MY FATHER'S *business*: that I am now acting in my proper sphere, that I am now about my real father's business, that I must be employed as I am?

No mere man, no prophet ever assumed the power of forgiving sins: the forgiveness of sins was universally held to be the prerogative of God alone; and therefore when our Lord exercised that authority, the Scribes we find accusing him of blasphemy.* Hence then it follows, that arrogating to himself a power, which did not belong to man, he either assumed a greater authority than he had a right to exercise; or that he was supra-human, and therefore took upon him no higher power than what strictly belonged to him.

* Matt. ix. 3.

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When it is ſaid, Matt. xi. 27. that *no one knoweth the father, except the ſon*: it is very clear, that the nature of the father is intended. And in the ſame verſe when it is declared, that *no one knoweth the ſon, but the father*; the context ſhews, that the nature alſo of the ſon is alluded to. For as to his office, many knew him to be the Meſſiah; and acknowledged him as ſuch. But the knowledge, here implied, appears to be of a very different and ſuperior kind: a knowledge delivered immediately by the father; a knowledge, which man did not poſſeſs, for even his diſciples do not appear to have been compleatly acquainted with it, till after his reſurrection; even the knowledge of his eternal power and godhead. *All things are delivered to me of my father: and no man knoweth the ſon, but the father.* SERMON VIII.

After our Lord had ſilenced the Sadducees, on the ſubject of a reſurrection; the Phariſees we are told entered into controverſy

SERMON VIII.

controverſy with him; to whom He propoſed the queſtion in my text. They in reply returned him the uſual anſwer: on which he preſſed them with the prophetic declaration of David; *I the Lord ſaid unto* MY *Lord, ſit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy foot-ſtool.* And he then argues on the words with ſuch force; that if he did not effect the conviction of his hearers, he at leaſt left them without the power of reply. We might riſk the iſſue of the preſent controverſy on this ſingle paſſage: ſo deciſive is it in point. The ſcope of it appears too plain to be miſtaken: I will therefore only enlarge on the words, and leave it to the moſt determined opponent of Chriſt's divinity, to find a different meaning.

Our Lord's general queſtion was, "what think ye of the Meſſiah?" "We conſider him, anſwer the Phariſees, as an illuſtrious prince deſcended "from that glorious king of Iſrael, Da"vid."—

"And

"And nothing more, rejoins our Lord, SERMON VIII.
"than a great man, an illustrious
"prince?"—The reply is, "no." "If
"that were the case then, saith our
"Lord," with what propriety could that great and glorious monarch, the greatest that ever filled the throne of Israel, in the spirit of prophecy declare of him, declare of any mere human being, however exalted in rank, or blazoned with victories, "that he was HIS
"Lord: and that Jehovah would seat
"him on his right hand?" Consider the just degree of profound reverence, with which the Jews contemplated Jehovah, whose adorable perfections no epithet will suit; whose name, except on the most solemn occasions, they feared to pronounce, and never heard it without a reverential bow: and the force of our Lord's argument applies with irresistible power; in demonstrating that the Messiah must be by nature superior to David, something more than man. And if we be asked what effect this argument

SERMON VIII.

gument had on his hearers minds: the effect was such, as truth must ever produce on minds which obstinacy had seared with impenetrable callosity, the forced assent of silence. *They were not able to answer Him:* they could not refute his arguments; nor, without giving up their prejudices, and retracting their erroneous opinions concerning the nature of the Messiah, could they admit the force of them: they therefore made him no reply. *Nor durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.*

Of that day, and that hour, saith St. Mark, *knoweth no man; no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the son, but the* FATHER. Though we may not presume to ground a doctrine on verbal construction, it may be alledged as a circumstantial evidence of the truth of it, when grounded on a firmer foundation: and as such I submit to consideration the preceding climax; which represents the nature of Christ, not only as distinct from,

and

and ſuperior to that of mere man, but even above the angelic nature itſelf. SERMON VIII.

The Evangeliſts Matthew and Luke mention the circumſtance, of John having ſent two of his diſciples to enquire of Jeſus; whether he were that great prophet, John had been taught to expect, or not. Our Lord in anſwer refers them to his works; leaving their maſter from them to form his judgment of him. When they were gone, he very naturally addreſſed to thoſe, who were about him, ſome reflections on the character of John: which He repreſented to have been ſo high, that *among thoſe who were born of woman there was not a greater prophet than he.* Then with alluſion to his own nature, rank, and dignity, which the queſtion aſked by John's Diſciples very aptly introduced, he added; *but he, that is leaſt in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he:* in the kingdom of heaven, in that kingdom, where previous to my exiſtence

SERMON VIII.

ence here on earth I enjoyed glory with my father, who is in heaven: great prophet as he is, of course he is very interior to me. In support of this expoſition I will only add, that the common gloſſes on the paſſage give no pertinency to the laſt clauſe; nor do they obviate an apparent falſity in the clauſe preceding: for if Chriſt had not conſidered himſelf, of a nature and dignity ſuperior to that of a mere prophet, he muſt at leaſt have excepted himſelf as a much greater prophet than John.

If from the evangelical hiſtories of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we proceed to that of John; the ſcope and tenor of his goſpel we ſhall find ſtill more clearly declarative of the divinity and pre-exiſtence of Chriſt. To inculcate that doctrine, appears to have been the particular deſign of it. The prefatory verſes of that goſpel, as hath been already intimated, are full in point; and ſeem to have been directly levelled at the oppoſite error.

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error. *In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.* And, as if to enforce a doctrine that had by ſome been queſtioned, he repeats it: ουτος, this very word, *was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made, that was made. And the word was made fleſh, and dwelt among us.* And this doctrine, adds the Evangeliſt, was confirmed by John the Baptiſt; who allowed him preference in honour, in conſequence of ſuch his priority of exiſtence: *He was preferred above me, for he was before me.* SERMON VIII.

No man hath aſcended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which was in heaven. For the expoſition of this verſe, obſerve the context: for ſcripture is beſt explained by ſcripture. *Verily, verily, ſaith our Lord, we ſpeak that we do know, and teſ-*

John iii. 13.

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SERMON VIII.

tify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not; how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things. No man ever ascended up to heaven, and there received in an enlarged mind the communication of divine knowledge, except him who came down from heaven, to whom alone that knowledge was communicated, even him, who had his first existence in heaven.* The force of this passage cannot be better ascertained, than by the figment fabricated by Socinus to elude it: who supposed Christ to have taken a journey to heaven after his baptism; and afterwards to have returned to the earth, and entered upon his ministry.

The Baptist in direct words testifies in acknowledgment of Christ's superiority, that *He came from above*; and then as-

* Ο ων εν τω ουρανω. The participle present here, as in various other passages, has the signification of an imperfect.

it were in explanation of the term he had made use of, by the word ἄνωθεν *from above*, he instructs his hearers, that he meaned *heaven*. *He, that cometh from above, is above all: he, that is of the earth, is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: He, that cometh from heaven, is above all.* SERMON VIII.

And in this declaration of our Lord, *I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me*; he plainly assumes the doctrine of his having descended from heaven, as a truth, to which that full assent, he had repeatedly demanded, he supposed was implicitly paid: and declares his motive for such an humiliation to have been obedience to his father's will; and his design, a full determination in every article to pursue it. And in a few verses distant distinguishing himself, by the particular communication he had enjoyed with the father in heaven, as alone competent to know and teach the perfect will of God, he adds; *it is indeed*

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SERMON VIII.

written in the prophets, that all men shall be taught of God: not that any man hath seen the father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the father; he is intimately acquainted with the nature and essence of God, he alone exactly knows his will, and deep designs, his hidden counsels, secret, and unfathomable by the human mind.

This doctrine of Christ's divine nature and pre-existent state appears to have given offence to some of his followers: which however we find him very far from retracting, or explaining away. On the contrary, with an indignant reproof he adds, *does this offend you?* And then perseveringly maintaining the doctrine, he had clearly asserted, he foretels his future ascension to those mansions, he had formerly left: and asks them, if such an appeal to their senses would satisfy their doubts; *what, and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up, where he was before?*

His

His ſuperiority of nature, in a chapter or two following, is in terms the moſt unequivocal again aſſerted: *ye are from beneath, I am from above; ye are of this world, I am not of this world:* and (as the chain of ſubſequent reaſoning ſupplies) if you will not believe this account of myſelf, which I have ſo expreſſly and repeatedly declared; *ye ſhall die in your ſins. Then ſaid they unto him, who art thou?* To which queſtion, expreſſive of the moſt invincible obſtinacy on their part, he made them no other reply than, *the very ſame, that I ſaid unto you from the beginning*, that I have conſtantly and uniformly declared myſelf; the Son of God, that came down from heaven to do my father's will, and redeem you from your ſins: which great truth ye will not believe, and muſt therefore die in your ſins. This paſſage evidently declares the reaſon, why they ſhould die in their ſins; becauſe they did not believe him to be the Son of God, and to have come down from heaven, to do his

SERMON VIII.

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SERMON VIII.

father's will, and to redeem them from their sins. And if their disbelief in that article was a sin; the doctrine, in which they were so urgently required to believe, was a truth.

Towards the close of the same chapter, we find the same doctrine again insisted on; and in terms so express, that his hearers, though they would not believe him, appear by their rude proceedings to have perfectly understood his meaning: for irritated at the claim of divinity, which he arrogated, *they took up stones to cast at him.* The offensive declaration was a direct assertion of his pre-existence: *before Abraham was, I am.*

In a conversation with his disciples, the plain scope of which was to prepare them for his departure, and console them under their loss, he tells them that in this world he counted not his origin, nor was the condition he had here assumed his

his true and proper ſtation; and that, in removing hence, he was only going to the place of exalted happineſs and glory, which in coming hither he had ſo lately left. *I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the father.** The antitheſes evince the literal meaning of the above paſſage beyond a doubt. The world he was going to leave, was the very ſame world into which he a little before had come; and the world, or ſtate of exiſtence, with the father, into which he was going to remove, was the world, or ſtate of exiſtence with the father, which, when he came to viſit this world, he had left. This the Diſciples, to whom the words were particularly addreſſed, underſtood to be ſo clear and intelligible; that they immediately obſerved, *lo, now ſpeakeſt thou plainly, and ſpeakeſt no parable.*

SERMON VIII.

* John xvi. 28.

SERMON VIII.

I will close this general examination of the histories of our Lord's life with a passage in that remarkable prayer, immediately preceding his apprehension; which throughout speaks the heart, and mind, and design, and interest of an inhabitant of another world, a stranger and sojourner here. *And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.* These words plainly declare his pre-existence, and his pre-existence also in a state of glory; with the avowed consciousness of the glories of that his pre-existent condition. And as the generality of readers, I will say farther from the perspicuity of the passage, every impartial and unprejudiced reader, must so understand the import of the words: it follows, either that the declaration is calculated to deceive, or that it is absolutely true; either that Jesus arrogated in it a degree of pre-eminence, to which he had no claim, or that

that he was of a nature ſupra-human, pre-exiſtent, and divine. SERMON VIII.

After his reſurrection he was conſtantly and uniformly preached by his apoſtles, as a ſuperior being; not a ſeparated ſoul in hades, nor a drowſy ſoul ſleeping away a long period of exiſtence in the grave: but as enjoying glory with God, that ſtate of glory he had affirmed to have enjoyed with Him before his humiliation on earth. And the apoſtle Paul, in his Epiſtle to the Coloſſians, doth in the plaineſt language confirm the doctrine of his pre-exiſtence; and, in that pre-exiſtent ſtate, of his inſtrumentality in the creation of the world *For in him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are on earth, viſible and inviſible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created through him and for him.* * And I the rather cite this paſ-

* Col. i. 16. and 17.

ſage,

SERMON VIII.

sage, as it forms a kind of comment; explaining, and confirming a similar assertion in St. John's Gospel in its primary and literal acceptation. *All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.**

On these words of the Evangelist Socinus remarks, that "the words, *all things*, are not to be admitted in so general a sense as is commonly supposed, denoting the original formation of the world." — "They are not to be taken, continues he, in their primary sense, as if referable to the material world; but are to be applied to the publication and reception of the gospel: as if John had said, all these spiritual and divine transactions, which are seen among us in the world, are derived from no other source than the preaching of the gospel of Jesus

* John I. 3.

Christ;

"Christ; and were effected by his in- SERMON
"fluence and power." VIII.

That such interpretation of the words of the Evangelist is as false, as it is forced, foreign, and jejune, the preceding passage cited from St. Paul demonstrates. It doth most clearly ascertain the literal interpretation of the passage in the Evangelist, and enforce the truth of it: evincing that the words could not be used in that figurative sense, Socinus hath affixed to them; not referred to moral habits, and spiritual improvements. Things *in heaven*, as well as *on earth*, *invisible*, as well as *visible*, *whether they be thrones, dominions, principalities, or powers*, refer to a more extensive creation, than that of new moral habits, a reformation of manners in this world; and disprove the idea of restriction to this world, or any thing solely connected with it.

The general scope and uniform tenor of the scriptures of the new Testament, respecting

SERMON VIII. respecting the doctrine of Christ's divinity and pre-existence, having thus endeavoured to evince; I proceed, as was propoſed in the ſecond place, to obviate ſome objections, that by certain writers of the preſent day have been advanced againſt it.

II. One objection to this doctrine is founded on the appellative man, in ſome paſſages of the new Teſtament applied to our Lord: as in Acts ii. 12. *Jeſus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you:* and again, *He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world by that man, whom He hath ordained.* Acts, xvii. 31. And to theſe paſſages, from the Epiſtle of Paul to Timothy, I will add another; *there is one mediator between God and man, the man Chriſt Jeſus:* remarking on this laſt paſſage, that the idea of a mere man being delegated to the high and important office of mediator between God and man, that is, between God and himſelf, is leſs agree-

able

able to reaſon, than the doctrine of a ſuperior and divine exiſtence, by inheritance ſo claiming, or ſo ordained. SERMON VIII.

Reſpecting the general application of the denominative MAN to Chriſt, we know that the Evangeliſt John ſays, he *was made*, or became, *man:* and as ſuch, he is in ſcripture frequently ſtiled MAN. But who is he, that St. John declares was made, or became, this individual man? Even that Divine Being, that exiſted with the father from the beginning. Acknowledging therefore with the Evangeliſt, that he was man; why are we not to believe the ſame Evangeliſt, who in ſubſequent words aſſures us, he was, prior to ſuch ſtate of humiliation, exiſtent with the father? *He was made fleſh*: and how is he, who hath ſhrined his divinity in the veil of manhood, to be otherwiſe denominated, than as man? Such humiliation of himſelf, while faſhioned in the form and figure of a man, whatever degree of divinity he might

under

SERMON VIII.

under that shape possess, would in historical detail characterise him as a man. Thus, Gen. 18. the three angels, one of whom is stiled the Lord, that is the immediate messenger or angel of the Lord, appearing in the form and substance of men, are stiled men. And, in the next chapter, of the angels, that in the assumed shape of men visited Lot, it is said; *and the men put forth their hands, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut the door.* Gen. 32. *A man* is said to have wrestled with Jacob: yet that man we learn was no other, than the angel of the Lord. *For Jacob called the name of that place Penuel; because he had there seen God face to face.*

A second objection to this doctrine is urged in terms to the following purport. "If a divine being, in the instance of "Christ, had really animated a human "body; it must have appeared in the "course of his history, that such an extraordinary measure was necessary."

Now

Now I really see not the necessity of the consequence inferred. If the fact really were so, I conclude it expedient and necessary, that it should be so; without seeing such necessity in terms asserted. However it happens, for the satisfaction of the objector; that the necessity is absolutely declared: though he has been so unfortunate, as to overlook the declaration. *Him God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible he should be holden of it.* Acts ii. 24. But if mere man, why not possible? The absolute impossibility therefore being thus asserted, according to this writer's requisition, by his own argument proves our Lord's divinity. SERMON VIII.

It is further objected against Christ's divinity, that his apostles are frequently represented as on a level with himself; and that many passages of scripture expressly say, they will be advanced to similar, if not equal honour. Unfortunately however for the bold asserter of

this

SERMON VIII.

this extraordinary remark, the very passages, adduced by him in proof of such equality, militate directly against it. Such are the following: *That they may be one; as thou, father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may be one in us.* — *And the glory, which thou gavest me, I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou has sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.* The import of the petition is, "that "closely connected as he was with the "father in love and obedience, so his "disciples might be in love and obedi- "ence to the father and him." The nature of the unity implied is further explained, in the subsequent clause *that they may be perfect* εἰς ἕν, *unto one thing*; "that they may unite in design and "operation to that one great end, the "redemption of mankind." And so far from declaring his disciples on a level with himself, the words imply a marked

marked inferiority to him: in as much as he, who gives glory, is ſuperior to him, to whom he gives it. The glory, here ſpoken of, is the power of working miracles; a power, which as the father had given him, he had exerciſed a ſimilar authority, and given to his diſciples, in teſtimony to the world, that he had received his commiſſion from the father; and in proof that the father, in permitting that power to be delegated to them, had loved them, not in the ſame degree, but καθως, as, even as, manifeſtly as, *thou haſt loved me.* Sermon VIII.

"Other parts of this remarkable "prayer, 'adds the author,' are in the "ſame ſtrain." For the ſatisfaction of my audience I will ſubjoin ſome of thoſe parts alluded to. *I have given unto them the words, which thou gaveſt to me: and they have received them, and have known ſurely, that I came out from thee, and they believed that thou haſt ſent me.* In this ejaculation how does our Lord here

SERMON VIII.

characteriſe his diſciples? Not as immediately coming themſelves from God; but as acknowledging him the immediate delegate of God, and knowing that he was ſo. Here is a manifeſt diſtinction obſerved between them: A diſtinction wide as the different degree of honour, in being the immediate delegate of God, come from the preſence and a participation of the glory of the father, to reveal his will to men; and one of thoſe, to whom ſuch revelation was made, and who acknowledged it: a diſtinction obvious as the difference implied in receiving a kingdom, and being appointed to employs of honour in that kingdom under him, who received it.

1. Cor. 15. 24. Chriſt's kingdom is ſaid to have an end: and from thence an argument is formed againſt his preexiſtence. *Then cometh the end, when he ſhall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father. And when all things ſhall be ſubdued unto him, then ſhall the Son*

alſo

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also himself be subject unto him, that put all things under him, that God may be all in all. SERMON VIII.

"This, says the objector, is what we should hardly have expected, if Christ had been the first of all created Beings: by whom all things were made, and who upholds and governs all things." It is sufficient to draw up this argument in form, to expose the weakness of it. "If Christ existed from the beginning, of his kingdom there could be no end. But the scriptures assure us, that of Christ's kingdom there will be an end: therefore he could not have existed from the beginning." How the termination of Christ's kingdom, erected on the redemption of mankind, should depend on the date of his first existence, it is not easy to conceive. When the economy of that redemption shall be completed, and Christ's mediatorial kingdom of course cease, by no rule of reasoning doth it follow, that Christ shall not continue to exist, accompanied with

SERMON VIII. every appendage of universal sovereignty, in the plenary enjoyment of an eternal weight of Glory.

In proof of Christ's absolute and real humanity another argument is founded on a passage in the epistle to the Hebrews, which in our translation runs thus. *We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour.* Heb. 2. 9. The original is, Τον δε βραχυ τι παρ' αγγελους ηλαττωμενον βλεπομεν Ιησουν, δια το παθημα του θανατου: and the literal translation, *for we see Jesus, who was for a little time lessened below the angels, for, or by, or on account of the suffering of death,* The word ηλαττωμενον is very significant of his pre-existence, and in a superior state. And the passage not only proves, that previous to his present humiliation, he did exist in a superior state; but in some measure ascertains the degree of superiority he possessed, viz. a state of nature above the angelic.

It

Psalm evinces the particular, in which he was lessened: not by any privation of his divinity, but in being subjected to the suffering of death, the angels enjoying a blessed immortality. SERMON VIII.

To the supposition of Christ having existed in a prior state and superior station it is objected, that St. Luke mentions in him an *increase of wisdom and stature*: which, on such supposition, the objector finds a difficulty in reconciling to his idea. There may be a difficulty; but it is certainly such as implies no impossibility. Let us therefore hear what scripture says in explanation of it.

The apostle to the Philipians ch. ii. v. 6. observes of Christ, that ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπαρχων, ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν, μορφὴν δούλου λαβών. The word μορφὴ signifies not only the external form or surface; but often the whole substance, and essential nature. And such is plainly the import of it in

SERMON VIII.

the passage before us: the Word in any other sense being inapplicable to God. According to this interpretation both of the word μορφη the meaning of the passage is obvious: "who, when he was "of divine nature and essence, emptied "himself, that is, divested himself of "his glory, taking the nature of a ser-"vant."

Let us next examine, how this passage of St. Paul corresponds with what the evangelist John hath said on the same subject: for scripture is the best comment on scripture. John i. Ὁ λογος ην προς τον Θεον, και Θεος ην ὁ λογος ... και ὁ λογος σαρξ εγενετο. *The word, that was with God, and that was God, was made*, or became, *flesh*.

Now if the logos, which the Evangelist says *was God*, and the Apostle affirms to have been *of the nature and essence of God*, according to that Evangelist became, or *was made flesh*, and according

to

to the Apostle took the nature of man: he took with it all the infirmities and affections of human nature; and must necessarily have experienced the imbecility of infancy, and with maturing age an increase of the powers of body and mind. SERMON VIII.

If it be questioned, in the language of Christ's sceptical visitor, *how these things can be*; how such an absolute conversion of the logos into manhood could be effected: with humble diffidence in our own capacity, let us ingenuously acknowledge we cannot explain it. But it hath been proved to be expressly asserted; and where the assertion implies no impossibility, I may on sufficient authority believe a fact, though I can neither explain, nor account for it. I have the assurance of an apostle, that *great is the mystery of Godliness, God manifest in the flesh*: as such I acknowledge it, without endeavouring to pry into secrets, perhaps known only to God himself; and without presuming, with

SERMON VIII. the key of human knowledge, to lay open that, which the ſpirit of God hath declared a myſtery. Our preſent inveſtigation is no farther concerned, than in proving it the doctrine of ſcripture. As ſuch, other arguments, and another train of reaſoning, will ſupply abundant proof that it is the doctrine of truth.

In vain preſumption to fix the bounds, within which divinity may expoſe or conceal its nature, another argument againſt the divinity of Chriſt is urged from the improbability "of a man, who "died on the croſs, having been the ma- "ker of the world." It is improbable too, that a Being, who, though in the appearance of man, was produced by the energetic influence of the holy ſpirit, and born without a human father; who could penetrate into the hidden ſecrets of mens hearts, who could control or ſuſpend the powers of nature, bid the ſea be ſtill, and be obeyed, and by diveſting himſelf of gravity, or giving a temporary ſolidity

to

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to the water, walk upon the ſwelling ſurge; who could exerciſe even a creative power, in feeding ſeveral thouſand people on ſome morſels, in themſelves inſufficient to ſatisfy a few individuals; and laſtly who, having died on a croſs, after his burial revived, and in embodied form and ſubſtance exerciſed all the functions of life, for the ſpace of forty days converſed freely with his friends, and after that aſcended openly before them into heaven; it is improbable, that he, who was poſſeſt of ſuch powers as thoſe, ſhould be that weak, impotent, limited being, a mere and abſolute man." SERMON VIII.

I will mention only one objection more; which is founded on the argument from analogy. From the aſſumed denial of the pre-exiſtence of human ſouls, it is inferred that the ſoul of Chriſt could not have pre-exiſted: analogy requiring, "that the whole human ſpecies "be upon one footing, in a caſe, which "ſo very nearly concerns the firſt and

"conſti-

SERMON VIII.

constituent principles of their nature. It is freely confessed, that no argument can be produced in proof of the pre-existence of human souls: and on the other hand it is equally clear, that no argument of weight can be advanced against the doctrine, except the want of consciousness: a defect, as hath been already observed, * from which the superior nature and mind of Christ were free.

As to the pre-existence of human souls, notwithstanding the many ingenious conjectures, that have been urged in support of it, conceding to this writer his full postulatum of its being a false and erroneous doctrine; no argument can be framed from the analogy of human nature to that of Christ. The difference of Christ's nature from that of mere man, is the great point in controversy: and to build an argument on the sup-

* See page 248.

posed

posed equality of them, is begging the question. What equality of nature is there in a mere man, and him, who was produced by the efficiency of the holy spirit, without a human father; between him, whose feeble powers are contained within narrow limits, and controled by positive laws, and him whose powers seemed to know no bounds, and, instead of submitting to, superseded the laws of nature; between him, whose body putrifies in the grave, and whose separated soul exists where the common course of mortality claims it, and him who triumphant over death rose from the grave, his soul not left in Hades, nor his body subjected to corruption? And in beings, wherein subsists so little equality, no argument can be founded on a supposed analogy: no, not even in the particular case, with which the argument we are now considering is qualified, "in the "first and constituent principles of na- "ture."

SERMON VIII.

Such

SERMON VIII.

Such are the principal objections, I have in modern writers * obſerved, to the doctrine of the pre-exiſtence and divinity of Chriſt: and to the objections of modern authors, on every ſubject in the courſe of the preceding lectures diſcuſſed, I have particularly applied myſelf. And now in a few words to preſs on you the ſubject of thoſe diſcourſes, let me obſerve; that, if there be a God, who made, and preſerved us, and who will take account of our conduct, there muſt be ſuch a duty as religion; and that it is both a ſerious, and a neceſſary thing: ſo ſerious, and ſo neceſſary, that as its regards extend to eternity, eternal happineſs or miſery attend our right election of, and correſpondent conduct in it. Freely inveſtigate it: examine the volume, in which as with the finger of God I think, and have ſuppoſed, it written. Though it may contain ſome

* Dr. Prieſtley, Mr. Lindſey, &c.

things

things hard to be understood; it holds forth much, that if practiced will improve our nature: enough so clearing and intelligible, as to excite our endeavours to understand it more and more. The doctrinal parts of religion are scientific: and where is the science, that hath not its mysteries? The most demonstrable of all sciences, even mathematics, has them. SERMON VIII.

Look through nature, as she lies before you in the works of this our world: and mystery meets the mind at every step. And will you extend your thoughts, beyond the confines of this habitable globe, to God, and a world to come; and not expect to find some mystery there? Shall we reject as false whatever we cannot comprehend? To how narrow a compass then shall we reduce truth? Doth human reason rank so high: or is God so level with the capacity of mankind? Shall we question his declarations, because we cannot accom-

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SERMON VIII.

accommodate to the size of our minds the design and propriety of them? Shall we fastidiously refuse assent to what He hath been pleased to reveal; because He hath not revealed more? Or shall we not rather with due gratitude and humility acknowledge the goodness of God, who hath by the revelation of Jesus Christ revealed so much: who hath condescended to unveil the blaze of divine majesty in such degree, as to enable mankind acceptably to serve Him; and so far made known the nature of another world, as to quicken our exertions, amidst the various mansions there to attain to a station of bliss and glory, through the applied merits and mediation of the same Jesus Christ our Lord?

Such is the anchor of hope, we have in Christ: and such in sum and substance the doctrine, which in answer to the words of my text the scriptures dictate. It is not in the ability of man to mend

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mend them *; nor shall human devices prevail in refining them. In plain legible characters, *they contain the words, all the words, of eternal life.* SERMON VIII.

* See Lindsey's sequel to his apology page 119.

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DE STATU PARADISIACO.

CONCIO

IN ECCLESIA BEATÆ MARIÆ APUD OXONIENSES HABITA.

Eccles. vii. 30.

Hoc tantum inveni; quod Deus homines perfectos creavit, ipsi autem ratiocinia plurima invenerunt.

TERRARUM hic noſter orbis, & quicquid in orbe viret, quicquid ultra hujuſce mundi fines aut oculus aſſequi, aut mens deprehendere poſſit, Deum optimum maximum arguit: tanta ſapientia, tanta ubique patet Potentia. O orbem fœlicem, ſummi artificis, omnibus abſolutum numeris, opus; cui herba

Concio IX.

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Concio IX. quæque levissima, cui quicquid avium pecudumque usquam invenitur, aut pulchritudinem aut usum suppetit! O hominum felicissimum genus, cui tot utilia, tot perpulchra serviunt! At longe aliter se res habet: tot tamque præclara et benevolentiæ et sapientiæ Dei argumenta malum multiforme inquinat. Morborum numerosa cohors, neque arte nec medicinâ depellenda, humana corpora obsidunt; animos pravi affectus detumpant; durâ adeo lege vivitur, ut *felicissimus ille, qui minus miser.*

Quo fonte derivata mala hæc, ut dicuntur, tam naturalia, quam moralia, vitam humanam miseriis erumnisque obruerunt; quo pacto homines felicitate exciderunt, quos felicitatis perfruendæ gratiâ in lucem evocavit Deus, et olim et nunc temporis variè contenditur. Hinc alii, quales sunt Manichæi, omnipotentiâ Dei denegatâ, dæmonem alterum potentem quidem, sed malefuadum et maleficum, fingunt: cui ordinis

per-

perturbatio cordi est. Quodcunque bonum aut excogitavit, aut effecit Deus, ut hoc inquiet, illud ut missum faciat, hic malorum opifex pro viribus usque laborat; et Artis chymicæ ratione quasi inversâ, ut ex optimo quoque malum eruat, huic labor atque opus est. Concio IX.

Alii potentiam Dei summam esse agnoscunt, providentiam ejus omnino tollunt. Deum talem designant, cujus majestati rerum humanarum moderamen ne minime conveniret; cujus felicitas ne perfecta et continuata fieret, hujusmodi curæ quam maxime obstarent: naturæ divinæ æstimatores pravi, quippe qui, uti de Epicureis testatur Cicero, * verbis relinquunt, re auferunt Deos; nihil curare eos nec sui, nec alieni, fingentes.

Ipsâ Dei existentiâ prorsus sublatâ, nodum alii audaciter resolvunt. Si Deus sit, sicut hi ratiocinantur, ab operibus suis cur malum haud procul amovit?

* Vid. Cic. de Nat. Deor.

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Concio IX. Aut nequivit sane, aut noluit. Vel potestas ejus, vel benevolentia est finita: Ens vero, quoquo modo finitum, nequit esse vere et absolute Deus. Ratiocinio igitur si huic assentiamur, rerum hic lucidus ordo nullo moderamine certo geritur; sed fors omnia versat.

Hisce variis de mali origine hypothesibus accedit altera; quae naturam humanam ita esse comparatam affirmat, ut a malo separari et sejungi humanitatis sors omnino nequeat. Animis, hac veri specie delinitis, malum quasi de essentia hominis esse videtur; et crimina quaeque misericordia potius, quam poena digna putantur. Hinc, non me malum! sed me miserum! clamare quisque in promptu habet: hinc neminem confitentem habemus reum; dum peccata quisque non sua deflet, sed quae humana parum cavit natura. Hominum vero crimina in naturam humanam dum temere transferant; ne in authorem naturae culpa ad extremum recidat, isti parum cavent philosophi.

Opi-

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Opinionum, quas supra memoravimus, prioribus tribus jam prætermissis; ad refellendam hanc posteriorem, quippe quæ neotericis quibusdam præcipue arridet, sententiam potius accingor. CONCIO IX.

Hominum genus e creatoris summi manibus, adeo appetens mali, adeo impotens benè beatèque vivendi, adeo imperfectum evasisse fingunt hujusce sententiæ propugnatores; ut innocentiæ perfectæ et fœlicitatis status nec fuerit unquam, nec fore poterit. Si vero Moseos de Statu Paradisiaco, atque autorum ethnicorum de ætate aureâ, scriptis quid veri insit; philosophorum istorum hypothesis reipsâ refellitur: et, ratiocinii sui fundamine sublato, cassum ruit quodcunque super extruitur. Statum igitur naturæ innocentiæ et fœlicitatis esse statum, ac sorte tali beatum hominum genus olim floruisse, hac in concione contenditur: cujus tripliciter divisæ hæc norma servabitur.

CONCIP IX.

I. Quid de hominum conditione primâ mundi ætate, in sacris scripturis traditum accepimus, primò exponendum est.

II. Auctores profanos, tum poetas, tum philosophos, eadem suffragantes, deinde proferam.

III. Hæc tandem dogmata de Statu Paradisiaco, ab antiquissimis scriptoribus tradita, rationi esse consentanea tertiò comprobabitur.

I. Sermonis itaque hujusce prædictam mihi servanti normam, quid de primigenâ hominum conditione, scriptura sacra tradit, primò investigandum est. Fabricationem [illegible] depingens Moses, * hæc refert;

* In isthâ narratione quædam esse parabolica, nonnulli existimant: alii etiam sermonem totum exemplar artificiosum esse volunt ad res veras explicandas; nempe naturæ primæ, statum Paradisiacum, & ejusdem degenerationem, necnon humani generis novitatem. Alii quasi historiam summâ fide dignam, narrationem totam sensu

referri; "Deus omnia, quæcunque fa- CONCIO IX.
bricaverat, aspexit; et ecce omnia bona:" omnia nempe ad assequendum finem, cujus gratiâ creabantur, in sese sat potestatis habuerunt. Innocentiam primævam, et mali originem historicus idem divinus planè et enucleatè exponit. Porro ratio vitæ, quam parentes primi agebant, morum simplicitatem et securitatem, ab innocentiâ omnino ortam, hisce verbis tradita, luculenter designat. "Ambo "erant nudi Adam et uxor ipsius, neque "illos pudebat*." Naturam nempe ducem et magistram secuti, nec labis ullius conscii, nulla vestium involucra quærebant; neque iis vitio fuit nuditas, dum

sensu omnino ad literam expresso complectuntur. Explicatio quænam sit verissima, hic loci non investigandum duco: talem, qualis contenditur, extitisse statum, degenerationem postea contigisse, sententiæ utriusque propugnatores pariter agnoscunt.

* Historici sacri sententiæ illi hæc Platonis conferatur. Γυμνοι δε και ασχημονοι συμπλεκοντες τα πολλα ενιοτε, το γαρ των αιδων αυτοις αλυπον ενειχετο.

CONCIO IX.

imago Dei; formâ humanâ elucescebat, peccato intaminata stetit.

Neque his solis clausulis Status Paradisiaci dogma innititur: scriptucis sacris excerptae, sententiae aliae proferri possunt, quae creationis mundi historiam, sicut a Mose traditam accepimus, non solùm innuere, sed plane affirmare naturae humanae perfectionem, satis arguunt. Innocentiae et felicitatis primorum parentum fidem apud Judaeos summam valuisse hinc praecipue liquet; quod Apostoli de sonte illâ beatâ, traditionibus acceptâ, Mose luculenter expositâ, prophetarum monitis munitâ, non obscurè, dubitanter, et quasi ambagibus, summâ vero cum fiduciâ, loquuntur: quippe quod pro certo usque habebatur. Sententias huc spectantes, in novo foedere passim dispersas, ut plurimas omittam; haec Pauli verba hujusce dogmatis argumentum amplissimum praebent. "Sicut uno homine "peccatum in mundum introivit, mors "quoque peccati causâ, &c." ac in

eodem

eodem capite paulum infra, " ſicut ho- Concio
minis unius inobedientiâ plurimi fiebant IX.
peccatores, &c." Quibus ex clauſulis Apoſtolum, ut ſatisfactionem Chriſti omnes complecti omnis ætatis homines probaret, felicitatis primæ jacturam non modo nudè et ſimplicitèr affirmare conſtat; hoc vero ex dogmate, quaſi re cognitâ et univerſim conceſsâ, ad alias probationes progreditur. Sed in re apertiſſimâ diutius cur immorandum? Tum felicitatem primævam, tum felicitatis iſtius jacturam, ſcriptura ſacra ſi alibi uſquam taceret; ad utramque probandam prædictæ ſolæ clauſulæ abunde ſufficiunt, et quaſi vim habent demonſtrationis. Sententias ergo ſupra memoratas hæc, de quâ jam concionamur, claudat. " Hoc " tantum inveni, quod homines perfec- " tos effinxit Deus; ipſi autem ratioci- " nia plurima invenerunt."

Clauſulis iſtis cæteriſque plurimis, quæ, idem ſpectantes, in ſcripturis ſacris inveniuntur, ſibi invicem collatis; hæc dogmata

CONCIO IX. dogmata summatim exinde sequi habentur. Mundi origine prima homines, uti alia singula sapientissimi et omnipotentis auctoris opera, perfecti creabantur. Appetitus singulos, ad felicitatem assequendam, ad promovendam virtutem unice spectantes, et mutuo et amice conspirantes, ratio gubernatrix administravit. Satis et ad felicitatem et ad virtutem valebant: dum hanc excolant, illâ fruuntur, hac læsâ, illa amittitur. Libera bene beateque vivendi datur potestas; nulla imponitur necessitas: cuique incoacta sua stetit voluntas. Minus morigeros denique se præbuerunt, imperium Dei repugnarunt, justaque detrectarunt: Inobedientiæ suæ pœnas luebant. Hinc malum oritur; et vires acquirens eundo, longe latèque ingruit. Hoc fonte derivata, clades omnigena ubique diffunditur; hinc, quicquid vitam humanam miseram aut insuavem reddit, quale quale infit amari, id totum accipit; ferosque in nepotes deducens, contagii instar, naturam humanam

commutasse

commutasse videtur; immo, si fas sit vera loqui, commutavit. Concio IX.

II. Sensu scripturæ sacræ de primâ hominum conditione ita breviter exposito; quid de eâdem autores profani conscripserunt, servato proposito, proximè investigandum est: rerum enim antiquissimarum, quæ in literis sacris continentur, historiam, apud omnes gentes, quamvis plerumque obscuram, remansisse constat. Cumque concionis nostræ norma clausulas ex scriptoribus ethnicis plures, quàm in hujusce generis scriptis commendat usus, proferri postulet; apud hunc confessum me excusatum iri spero. A philosophis igitur ad historicis, quippe queis major quam poetis fides habetur, initium sumendum duco. Quos inter præcipuus Plutarchus, philosophus idem et historicus, regionis cujusdam, notis Paradisi distinctæ, nomine insularum beatarum designatæ, descriptionem exhibet: cui orbis terrarum portiuncula omnino

Concio IX. nino nulla nunc temporis convenit.* "Imbres, inquit ille, rari et amœni hîc "loci decidunt; dum venti molliter spi- "rantes, et rore quasi alati, insulam per- "vagentur: quibus efficitur, ut sine studio et "labore nullo eliciti, omnigenæ herbæ "fructusque jucundissimi sponte nascan- "tur." Descriptioni huic sententiam proxime sequentem historicus insuper addit. "† Adeo ut fides usque adhuc "baros perlata firma est, illic campos "esse Elysios, et beatorum sedes quas "Homerus decantavit." Hinc de Paradiso, sive beatorum sede quid sensit Plutarchus, quid etiam barbari sentire, liquet.

* Ομβροις δε χρωμεναι μετριοις σπανιως, τα δε πλειστα πνευμασι μαλακοις και δροσοβολοις, ου μονον αρουν και φυτευειν περιεχουσιν αγαθην και πιονα χωραν, αλλα και καρπον αυτοφυη φερουσιν, απροσδεητα πονου σχεδον και γεωργιας βιοτειν αυευ πονου και πραγματειας σχολαζοντα δημον. Plut. in Vit. Sert.

† Ωστε μεχρι των βαρβαρων διηκουσι πιστιν ισχυραν, αυτοθι το αθανατον ειναι σπιον, και την των ευδαιμονων οικησιν ην Ομηρος υμνησεν. Ibid.

Eadem

Eadem fere, quæ de insulis fortunatis Plutarchus, de insulâ Toprobanâ asserit Diodorus Siculus: hoc insuper addito, nempe quod hujusce regionis incolæ expertem morborum vitam agebant. Nec prætermittendum duco, quod de morte Taprobanitarum historicus idem tradit: utpote sententiam haud omnino isti dissimilem, quam scriptores quidam Christiani de morte, vel potius e vitâ excessu, in statu paradisiaco si homines usque permansissent, statuere. * "Duplex apud eos "nascitur herba; ori si quis indormiat, cru- "ciatûs omnis et doloris expertem mors "grata suavisque supervenit." Sententia ista Diodori Mosaicæ *arboris vitæ* explicationem fortasse verissimam præbet; quippe qua ab origine narratio illa primitùs derivatur. Mors, si historico sacro fidem habeamus, non humanitatis conditio, sed peccati pœna, plane constituta

Concio IX.

* Φυεσθαι γαρ αυτοις διφυη βοτανην, εφ ης οταν τις κωμηθη, ληθοδοτως και απονως προς υπνον κατενεχθεις αποθνησκει. Diod. Sic. lib. 2.

fuit.

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Concio IX. fuit. Arbori vitæ igitur talem quid vetat ineſſe vim, qualis fructum ejus guſtanti tranſitum facilem atque ſuavem ad immortalitatem conciliaret?

Paradiſum quendam in Africâ ſitum Procopius fingit; fontibus amœnis irrigatum, ſylvis ornatum, viridantibus uſque, quæque uſque dulce redolebant: quum aerem tepentem frigidulâ venti continuò mulcerent. Talem denique ſtatum, qualis hac in concione contenditur, olim revera extitiſſe, non ſolos inter Hebræos, aut Ægyptos, aut Græcos fides valuit; in idem conſentientes Indos quoque habemus: quos apud Calanus Alexandrum magnum ita alloquens a Strabone inducitur,* "Tritici hordeique olim

* Το παλαιον παντ' ην αλφιτων και αλευρων πληρη, καθαπερ και νυν λεγουσι· και ελαιου δ' ιερεου, το μεν υδατος, γαλακτος δ' αλλου, και μελιτος, το μεν μελιτος, το δ' οινου, τινες δ' ελαιου· υπο πλημμυρης δ' οι ανθρωποι και τρυφης εις υβριν εξεπιπτον. Ζευς δε, μισησας την καταστασιν, ηφανισε παντα, και δια τουτου τον βιον απεδειξε. Strab. lib. 15.

"erant,

"erant, sicut nunc pulveris, omnia plena; fontes quoque, alii aquâ, lacte alii, Concio LXXI
"alii melle, alii vino, nonnulli oleo fluebant: donec ob satietatem luxuriamque homines in contumeliam sese tradiderunt. Statum igitur præsentem Jupiter exosus, omnia abolevit, *vitamque labore degendam instituit." Nemo, utopinor, hæc legens, quo ex fonte manarint, diu dubitabit.

Scriptoribus istis, regionem naturâ plane eandem, situ loci utcunque diversam, designantibus philosophum gravem et ipsum omnium Platonem jam tandem liceat mihi subjicere. In dialogo isto, cui titulus Πολιτικος adscribitur, quippe qui, proœmium veluti, libris sequentibus Πολιτειας και νομων præponitur, de origine politiæ philosophus fusè disserit. Et re altè repetitâ, hominem a Deo creatum conditione primâ beatissimâ et verè aureâ

* Vid. Genes. Cap. 3 Com. 19.

potitum

Concio IX.

potitum esse docet. Ætatis aureæ et fælicis descriptionem μυθον appellat; traditionem aliunde desumptam isto nomine designans: ne quis forsan pro figmento et somniis quasi φιλοσοφευτος narrationem habeat. Fidem ac authoritatem quam huic μυθω conciliatam vellet, hæc sua testantur verba.* "Ista nobis tradiderunt primi "illi majorum nostrorum, qui primam "mundi revolutionem proxime contingebant. Horum sermonum testes præconesque illi extiterunt." Platonicæ isti primævæ fœlicitatis tabellæ, coloribus adeo vividis depictæ, haud abs re erit paulò diutius immorari: in qua si veritatem ipsam non deprehendamus, veritatis saltem vestigia nemo fere non agnoscet. †"Ætate ista, nihil erat ferum; "neque

* Απεμιμηνευετο δ' υπο των ημετερων προγονων των πρωτων, οι τελευτωσι μεν τη προτερα περιφορα του εξης χρονου εγειτονουν, της δε κατ' αρχας εφυοντο. Τουτων γαρ ουτοι κηρυκες εγενοντο ημιν των λογων. Plato Πολιτ:

† Τοτε ουκ αγριον ουδεν, ουτε αλληλων εδωδαι, πολεμος ουκ ην, ουδε στασις τοπαραπαν. — Θεος ενεμεν αυτους, αυτος

επιστατων

" neque aliæ alias animantes vorabant: " aberat bellum penitus atque ſeditio. " ——Deus homines paſcebat; ipſe erat " et paſtor eorum et cuſtos: ipſoque " eos regente, civitatum conſtitutiones " nullæ extabant.——Fructus illis, et " poma et fruges, arbores et fertile ſolum " ſponte ſuâ ſubminiſtrabant." De Saturni regno alia plurima philoſophus idem ſcribit; quæ ſtatum paradiſiacum quam veriſſime deſignant. Alia, ut ipſe teſtatur, innumera, et illis longe mirabiliora, ab ejuſdem μυθου quaſi fonte permanant: longinquitate vero temporis, partim ſunt exoleta, partim diſperſa atque diſſipata perturbate dicuntur. Concio IX.

Deſcriptioni illi uberrimæ ſi quid amplius deerit, quo Platonis ſententia de hac re plenius eniteſceret; Τιμαιω, ſive περι φυσεως dialogi, pars iſta, in quâ de hominum creatione agitur, argumenta huc

επιςατων.—Νεμοντος δε εκεινου, πολιτειαι ουκ ησαν.—Καρπους δε αφθονους ειχον απο τε δρυων και πολλης υλης αλλης, ουκ υπο γεωργιας φυομενους, αλλ' αυτοματης αναδιδουσης της γης. Plat. ibid.

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CONCIO IX.

ſpectantia ampliſſima præbet; ubi de mali causâ et origine argutè differitur. Ex involucris tandem, quibus veritas fere obtenditur, hoc veri erui poteſt: homines benè, juſtè, et honeſtè vixiſſe contenditur, dum in ſemet impreſſam dei ſimilitudinem puram atque intaminatam conſervarent; malè vero, poſtquam cupiditatibus craſſis et corporeis ſemet ipſos involviſſent.

Ab hiſtoricis et philoſophis ad poetas deſcendere, ac Homerum Elyſios campos depingentem in primis audire, erit operæ pretium.

Vitæ hic humanæ ratio jucunda paratur;
Nec fera tempeſtas, nec nigri nubila cæli
Inficiunt æthram, tranquillâ luce ſerenam:
Suaviter aſt Zephyri ſpirantes arva ſalutant,
Et leviter ſtringunt recreata ſilentia ponti.

Quid de hortis Alcinoi dicam? Nonne et hi et illi ab eodem fonte deriva-

* Τῃ περ ῥηϊστη βιοτη πελει ανθρωποισι,
Ου νηφετοι, ουτ' αρ' χειμων πολυς, ουτε ποτ' ομβρος.
Αλλ' αιει ζεφυροιο λιγυπνειοντας ανητας
Ωκεανος ανιησιν ανακψυχειν ανθρωπους.

tur?

tur? Vana omnino fictaque cecinisse poetam grex totus criticorum negat. Quó vero pictura illa amœni, immo amœnitatis, horti referenda est? Non, ut iidem fingunt, ad insulas Atlanticas; neque usquam regionum præter eam, ab hominibus primis enarratam, a primis scriptoribus depictam, præter Paradisum. Concio IX.

Genus hominum primigenorum decantans, locum Homero proximum Hesiodus sibi vendicat; ejusdem, ut aliqui volunt, ut alii, ætatis prioris scriptor.

Tunc homines divûm vivebant more; neque illos
Anxia curarum moles, operumque labores
Lassabant: aberat morbus, tristisque Senectus.
Igneus ast ollis vigor; et dum corpore vires
Regnabant solido, convivia læta placebant.
Mors similis somno fuit, atque uberrima tellus
Omnia liberius nullo cogente ferebat
In commune bonum, nec quisquam invidit habenti.

* Ωστε θεοι δ' εζων ακηδεα θυμον εχοντες
Νοσφιν ατερτε πονων και οιζυος· ουδε τι δειλον

Nemo,

Concio IX.

Nemo, ut opinor, ſcriptorum Chriſtianorum ſtatum Paradiſiacum plenius et melius depinxit, quám in iſtis verſibus Heſiodus. Ætatem auream ab Ovidio in libro primo metamorphoſium expreſſam, utpote omnibus notam, prætermitto. Neque de regno Saturnio tacet Virgilius:

Ante jovem nulli ſubigebant arva coloni:
Nec ſignare quidem, aut partiri limite campum
Fas erat; in medium quærebant: ipſaque tellus
Omnia liberius, nullo poſcente, ferebat.

Ad calcem libri proxime ſequentis ſcilicet ſecundi Georgicorum, hi verſus idem quoque ſpectant.

Ante etiam ſceptrum Dictæi regis, et ante
Impia quàm cæſis gens eſt epulata iuvencis;
Aureus hanc vitam in terris Saturnus agebat.

Ἓξ μὲν γὰρ ἑτὴν αἰεὶ δὲ πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ὁμοῖοι
Τέρπονθ' ἐν θαλίῃσι, κακὰν ἐκτοσθεν ἀπαντὴν
Θῆκεν δ' ὡς ὑπνῳ δεδμημένοι· ἐσθλὰ δὲ πάντα
Τοῖσιν ἐπ' καρπὸν ἔφερε ζείδωρος ἀρουρα
Αὐτομάτη, πολλόντε, καὶ ἀφθονόν, ἐτ.

Heſ. Ἔργ. Καὶ Ἡμερ.

En

En manifeſtam ſtatûs Paradiſiaci notam : quum homines nondum animalium carne, ſed ſolis terræ fructibus veſcerentur! Sententiæ iſtæ variæ, ex ſcriptoribus antiquis excerptæ, ſuaviloquis hiſce verbis Lucretianis jam tandem claudentur. CONCIO IX.

Iamque adeo affecta eſt ætas, affœtaque tellus,
Vix animalia parva creat, quæ cuncta creavit
Sæcla, deditque ferarum ingentia corpora partu.

Præterea nitidas fruges, vinetaque læta
Sponte ſuâ primum mortalibus ipſa creavit.
Ipſa dedit dulces fœtus, et pabula læta :
Quæ nunc vix noſtro grandeſcunt aucta labore.

Statum hominum primigenium eo, quo nunc degitur, perfectiorem ecce ipſum Epicuri diſcipulum plane agnoſcentem habemus. Neque ſtatum naturæ talem poeta iſte agnoviſſet, niſi ut rem fide digniſſimam : rem universâ traditione acceptam, graviſſimorum hominum auctoritate ſancitam. Narrationes igitur iſtas, quibus ipſe Lucretius ſuffragatur, pro

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Concio IX. anili fabellâ ecquis ducet? Scriptorem illum, qui animum fabulis variis arctisque religionis compagibus occupatum exsolvere jactat, illum inquam credulitatis arguere, ecquis in animum inducat?

De statu Paradisiaco quæ tot tantique scriptores protulerunt, alii pènè innumeri, si res postularet, et locus ferret, eadem suffragantes allegari possent. Quid, ista omnia de conditione hominum primigeniâ pro figmentis poeticis habenda putabimus? Nonne philosophos, nonne historicos, viros eruditos gravissimosque in eadem consentientes habemus: singulos, si non vera, certe verisimilia proferentes? Atque istas singulas de regno Saturni, ætate aureâ, et similibus descriptiones, obumbratas quidem et variis erroribus implicitas, historiæ Mosaicæ vestigiis insistere et insequi nullus dubito. Ab extremo fonte, nempe a primævis hominibus derivatas, verissimas ætatis primæ narrationes accepit

cepit Noa: eaſdemque, a Noæ filiis traditas, poſteros accepiſſe, conſtat. * CONCIO IX.

III. Tertiò probandum reſtat, ut hiſtoriæ iſtæ de Statu Paradiſiaco, a primis hominibus acceptæ, ſcriptoribus tum ſacris, tum profanis confirmatæ, minimé futiles eſſe et ineptæ demonſtrentur: immo e contra, rationi conſentanea, naturâ humanâ digna, Deo optimo maximo digniſſima eſſe hypotheſis iſta contenditur. Omne ens, ut loquuntur ſcholaſtici, eſt perfectum: quo dogmate perfectio relativa, non abſoluta, ſignificatur. Quodcunque a ſapientiſſimo Deo creatum eſt, id omnibus numeris abſolutum creari neceſſe eſt: dum ſingulæ cujuſque animantis facultates atque organa, inopiis ſuis ſubveniendis, ſuis optatis potiundis aptæ et idoneæ, fœlicitati propriæ inſer-

* Primam hominis vitam cum ſimplicitate fuiſſe, et nudo corpore, docebant et Ægyptii; unde aurea poetarum ætas, etiam Indis celebrata, ut apud Strabonem eſt. Grotius de ver. Rel. Chr. lib. 1. Sect. 16.

Concio IX. viant, ad fœlicitatem propriam assequendam omnino sufficiant. Hoc experientia docet omnium, qui in studiis historiæ physicæ versantur: hoc, quaquaversum oculos circumferamus, adeo constat, ut si Davidi liceat jure exclamare, '*O Domine, in sapientiâ omnia fecisti*: haud injuriâ exclamationem alteram subjecit, *terra, O Domine, plena est benevolentiâ tuâ.*

O infœlicem humanæ naturæ sortem, O homines infortunatos: qui, hujusce orbis dominatores constituti, in hoc orbe miseri soli deprehenduntur; qui tot animalium principes, uniuscujusque sua quatenus postulat natura perfecti, imperfecti soli effinguntur! Cuinam enim bono dux ista et jucundissima comes vitæ, ut vanè garriunt philosophi, ratio inservit? Quapropter divinæ ista auræ particula nobis concessa est? Anne, ut perfectionis istius, istius virtutis apicem hominibus ostendat, quem natura humana nequit attingere; anne ob ea ut excruciet homines, quæ hominum natura effugere nequit,

nequit, commissa; anne ut miseros homines reddat? *Talia, O Domine, procul tibi absint consilia!* Actionum ergo humanarum moderatrix ista conceditur, ut actiones morales dirigat, ut appetitus cohibeat, ut vitam suavem atque jucundam reddat. Ei itaque assequendo fini aut sufficit ratio, aut non. Si non, impar est fini instituto; ac homines, quibus hujusce finis gratiâ ratio conceditur, eatenus sunt imperfecti: Omne vero ens e manibus creatoris perfectum evasit. Fini igitur proposito sufficit ratio: nunc autem temporis fini isti rationem haudquaquam sufficere experientia quotidiana testatur; ergo olim se rem ita habuisse necesse est. Atque ex his ratiociniis sequitur, talem fuisse primævum naturæ humanæ statum, qualem a primis scriptoribus expressum accepimus. Concio IX.

Quantum miseriarum vitam hominum obsidet, neminem latet: ac prævidentia ipsa miseriarum quæ eludi nequeunt, quas

Concio IX.

quas neque prudentia effugere, neque ipsa virtus repellere valet, æruminas istas graviores reddit. Ferarum vita in malis versatur; illas vero nec præteriti recordatio, neque timor futuri excruciatas tenet; natura illis largita est jucunda oblivia vitæ. Ast morbi, dolores, mors, et pallida malorum cohors, non modo hominum vestigia comites certissimi insequuntur, oculis autem continuo obversantur, et mentibus quasi inhærent. Et si partem alteram vitæ humanæ, lucidam nempe et splendidiorem, contemplemur, certa hominesne minima quidem voluptas manet. Hoccine vero creatoris benevolentis, hoccine est Dei optimi maximi; ut animantes crearet, quas magna et plurima necessario premunt mala; quarum vitas voluptates parvulæ tantùm, breves, et fortuitæ mulcent?

Quid, nonne hominis vita, affectibus cum ratione bellum civile gerentibus, certamine perpetuo versatur? Meliora laudare atque probare, deteriora sequi, humanum

humanum est. Spes, Timor, Ira, Grex totus affectuum ασυνταξιαν ciens, vicissim dominatur; dum ratio, gubernatrix veluti timida et pusilla, servis istis rebellibus politiam hominis internam administrandam tradit. Facultatum hanc humanarum dominam et reginam, quid verum est atque decens monentem, homines male adversantur: iis, prava jubentibus, aures faciles præbent; qnodcunque mali consulunt, obtemperare heu nimis parati! Hebescentibus deniqne et quasi defatigatis appetitibus torva aspici redit ratio; delictique nos tunc serò pudet, pigét, pœnitetque. Quid multis? Peccare, et pœnitere, atque iterum peccare, vitam humanam miserâ vicissitudine distinguit. CONCIO IX.

Humani generis Picturæ tali tabellam alteram et longè diversam jam tandem conferre liceat: hominis imaginem, innocentiæ et fœlicitatis compotem. Corporis atque animi vires puta aptè amicèque conspirantes: mentem scientiâ omnigenâ instructam; arbitrium voluntati

Dei

Concio IX. Dei inserviens; appetitus congrua et consentanea quærentes, affectus denique summissos et rationi obtemperantes: facultatibus humanis ita ordinatis, (et facultates rectè ordinari quid vetat?) harmonia Platonica inde sequitur; hinc Moseos Status Paradisiacus; hinc ætas aurea poetarum.

Perfectionis istius apicem, in qua homines primitus creari demonstrat ratio, ipsorumque conditionem, quam experientia hodierna probat, qui perpenderunt philosophi, tantæ metamorphoseos causas hinc et inde quæsiverunt. Quin talis effecta fuit Morum atque Indolis Mutatio, nemo fere dubitavit; causa usque latebat. Nodum istum resolvere, nodum hercle Deo vindice dignum, veritatis fons et principium Deus ipse dignatus est: *Nubesque inter et tenebras, quæ obvolvunt eum, æquitatem et justitiam solo ejus insidere, demonstravit.* Et ecquis adeo iniquus est rerum æstimator, qui œconomiæ divinæ explicationem talem nullius ponderis aut

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aut usûs leviusculi pendit? At nihilile Concio IX.
interest, ut de Deo et nobis ipsis recte sentiamus? Nihilne interest, ut nobis innotescat, quam ob culpam in hunc mundum, veluti in carcerem, Deus homines relegavit; miseriis innumeris obsitos, fœlicitatis veræ vix umbris relevatos? Hæc denique nescientibus, fœlicitatem eorum futuram ecquæ argumenta compertam facient? Si hic miser sim, et id unde fiat, nescio; quomodo sciam me non posthac quoque miserum futurum? Dubitationes istas curasque sollicitas, quibus tenetur quisque cui sua fœlicitas cordi est, Deus jam benignè dissipavit; et formidinis loco spes novas suppeditavit. Verbum igitur Dei, in scripturis sacris quasi jubare conscriptum, in queis reteguntur arcana, mundi ab origine primâ caliginosi erroris nebulis obvoluta, in queis solummodo salus, in queis nuda simplexque veritas deprehenditur, animo facili gratoque amplecti, nostrum est. Hoc duce usâ, vires novas

ratio

Concio IX.

ratio depromet; quæ, si male fastidiosa ducem sequi dedignetur, in errorum turbine tumultuante illico immergitur: quo fit, ut nihil ferè adeo absurdum inveniatur, quod non aliquis θεολογαντων nostratum asseveravit.

FINIS.

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ERRATA.

		Page
For	*Practiſe* read *Practice*	7
——	*Weakneſſes* read *Weakneſs*	92
——	*Man* read II. *Man*	96
——	*Diffidence* read *Diſſidence*	139
——	*Sermon XI.* dele	160
——	*em* read *me*	166
——	*Reverence* read *Reference*	172
——	*lay* read *lie*	174
——	*and conſidered,* dele *and*	175
——	*nor do* read *neither do*	191
——	*Their Prieſts* dele	193
——	*Lic. de Divinitatione* read *Cic. de Divinatione*	200
——	*termed* read *ſtiled*	216
——	προτοτοκος read πρωτοτοκος	232
——	*Reſurection* read *Reſurrection*	235
——	*them* read *them away*	271
——	*eluceſſens* read *eluceſcens*	280
——	*Tobrobanitarum* read *Taprobanitarum*	285
——	*hæe* read *hæc*	287
——	*affætaque* read *effætaque*	293

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